

finding it was the easy part ...



GOLD

a summer story

a novel by Mike Bozart

[[[]]] ... *from the virtual inside flap* ...

Mark and Susan's marriage is on the rocks. Their east Charlotte home is entering foreclosure. The kitchen walls are being wallpapered with unpaid bills.

When Mark unexpectedly finds some record-setting gold nuggets, an erotically charged, suspense-laced, thought-filled gambit begins, twisting through the Carolina Beach tourist season.

Success slips through Mark's hands like grains of sand. Gold fever takes its toll in the sultry, scorching, Atlantic Coast heat. Who – or what – was chasing him? ... and why?

Susan, a Cherokee Native American, has had it; she can't continue in this sordid sexual saga, bereft of true love.

Subsequent chances for discovery are blown until David arrives from Raleigh to pick up a replacement part in Wilmington. A second odyssey soon begins in which no one can be trusted. Suspicion reigns. The scheming and deception soon reach a fatal nadir.

A young Haitian lady, an aspiring novelist, takes notes and gives up her heart, mind and body along the sensual way. An easy future awaits. All is going swimmingly; the surf is calm. Then a tragic rogue wave strikes yet again. Why?

The Filipina TV reporter knows more. Will she go to the cops? Will she cut a deal? Will she turn a blind eye? Will she look for the primal source? Will she throw the hungry dog a bodacious bone? But most importantly, will she survive the golden curse in this erotic steam-pot of madness?

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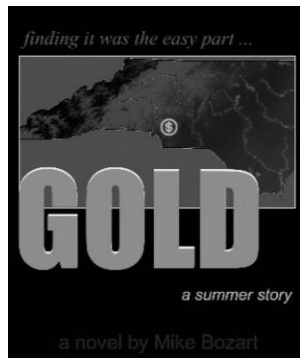
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And now for some somber legalese ...

First and foremost, this is a work of fiction. *GOLD* is not a factual account of any slice of the space-time continuum on Earth or anywhere else. Names, characters, places, events, incidents, and situations are either the product of the author's warped imagination or are used in a purely and wholly fictitious fashion. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or their otherworldly spirits, or any locales or known objects, is entirely, and without exception, coincidental.



cover art by m. van tryke

*... for my
lovely wife,
SHARON,
who has a
heart of gold.*

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Foreword

Let me tell you a secret - I've known author/raconteur/all-around strange guy Mike Bozart for many years and the man never fails to perplex me. The colorful splotches he calls his art perplex me, his attitude and what he calls "jokes" perplex me – hell, what this man generously calls his life perplexes the hell out of me.

So, when he came to me with his finished novel, *Gold*, I was, of course, perplexed yet again. How this man could take the skittering, scattershot ideas and constantly flickering images that ricochet off the walls of his ever-expanding brain and turn it in to a cohesive work such as a novel, totally made me want to read it immediately. And so I have.

And for once, I am not perplexed. Not only is *Gold* filled with the kind of action-packed excitement and sexual innuendo the poor souls in Hollywood usually need at least three sequels to convey, but the characters have the kind of fully-fleshed out feel only a master writer can offer. I was totally gripped by the story and felt that the characters became part of my life. A tremendous first novel and hopefully one of many to emerge from the mind of this literary madman.

– Scott Homewood, August 2013

Preface

It was another infernally hot and humid July afternoon in Charlotte, but I had this particular Friday off. Having procured a cheap metal detector, some prospector's pans and a spade, I was ready to find gold. Even though I knew that it was the longest of longshots – I knew that no one had found any decent-size gold nuggets in North Carolina in decades (I majored in Geology) – I was so sure that I was going to search the right hundred-square-foot area and strike it rich using the power of sunbaked-brain naïveté.

I was driving east on NC 24/27 (Albemarle Road), heading towards the old Reed Gold Mine while listening to *Charms* by The Philosopher Kings on the radio. (Yeah, I can still recall that day like it was yesterday.) It was the summer of '95. I pulled off the road and parked after crossing the bridge over Rocky River. At that time you didn't get hassled for doing such by the cops. I can't recommend it now.

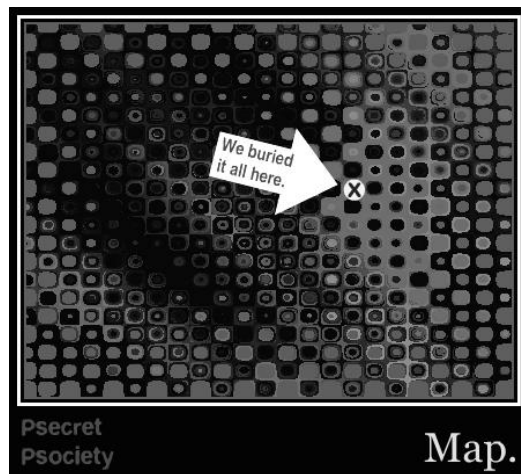
Well, to make a long story much shorter, I just got muddy, bit by at least a dozen mosquitoes and horseflies, and even nicked my foot on some broken glass in the stream. Needless to say, I didn't find any gold.

However, while driving back to Charlotte at sunset, I got the initial idea for this novel. It languished in my brain for some 18 years. *GOLD, a summer story* is the product of this neural fermentation.

Hope you enjoy it. The language is a bit coarse at times and the sexual interludes are somewhat graphic, but I was only staying true to the characters and offering a vivid account.

Acknowledgments

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“The desire of gold is not
for gold. It is for the means
of freedom and benefit.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Chapter 1

A hot, moist Thursday evening found things not so cool on the 30-something home front. Mark and Susan's modest two-bedroom east Charlotte home was entering foreclosure. One of their two cars, a four-year-old Nissan Sentra, had just been repossessed last week. Their remaining motor vehicle, a paid-off, eleven-year-old Dodge Neon with 187,781 miles on it, urgently needed a new transmission; sometimes it could barely make it up the driveway.

Another five-figure medical bill had arrived in the mail. There was already a stack of them on the far end of the kitchen counter; the pile was almost four inches high. Somewhere in the stack was a dead, flattened roach that Mark had crushed last Leap Day. Moreover, there was enough financial stress in their home to break the suspended back of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The trouble all started when Susan, who had been healthy her whole thirty-four-year life, got bit by an insect or spider – the doctors never were exactly sure what it was – on a camping trip two summers ago with her female friends in the Green River Cove area of the Pisgah National Forest. As a result, she almost lost her left leg. A combination of antibiotics spared her from an amputation, but her left knee was shot.

Susan hobbled around now. Standing for more than five minutes was hellish torture. As a result, she started taking prescription painkillers. Hydrocodone worked to her satisfaction for the first few months. But then she needed something stronger. It wasn't long before she was popping

oxycodone like Mentos candy. Then she got a script for the time-released version, OxyContin. When she found out that she could crush the pills for a more zonking stupor, it was game over.

Mark tried to intervene, but she was hooked. He would tell her that she needed to get off the pills and find a sit-down office job. She would just give him a lazy smile and retort, "I'm through with pain, baby – done with it."

They were barely making it when they had both incomes. Without Susan working, things got very tight. Mark started riding his refurbished ten-speed bike to work in downtown Charlotte to save money. It was only 4.8 miles one way and it kept him in shape. He actually grew to like it.

But then there was that frosty March morning when he made the right turn onto the Briar Creek Greenway Bridge a wee too fast. His front tire slid like a hockey puck on the frozen wooden planks. Mark went airborne over the handlebars as the bike crashed into the bridge's industrial-style metal railing. He had broken his right arm in three places, as well as torn his rotator cuff. When he tried to stand up, he realized that he had broken his right ankle as well. His thoughts were very dour. *When it rains, it pours; when there's frost, there's a cost. Why did I take that turn so fast? [sic] I knew it would be covered in frost. There's always condensation on that bridge in the early morning. What was I thinking? Why was I riding so fast in the first place? I'm thirty-eight years old for crying out loud. I'm too old to act like the Lance Armstrong of east Charlotte.* He re-entertained these thoughts numerous times over the next sixteen months.

As a result of the crash, Mark gave up the bike commute to work. He had to. It was just too much pain for his right ankle, which seemed to be taking forever to heal. He couldn't afford any more doctor visits or medical treatment.

The gasoline savings were gone. And so was the free parking. Mark now had to pay to park downtown, which was a considerable expense; his data-storage company stopped giving him a voucher. "We are in a recession and can't afford this perk anymore, Mark," his boss told him. Something about the bottom line and a recommendation from the accounting department.

They were in the money vise, feeling the maximum squeeze. Mark mused while staring at the dirty floor. *There must be some sideline business that I can do for extra income.* This thought was in repeat mode as of late in his squirming, nearing-panic-mode brain.

Mark started to actively search the dubious *Business Opportunities* listings in print and online. He saw a lot of overt pyramid schemes that would even make Ponzi blush. He passed on them. He remembered one day, while on the toilet in a public bathroom, noticing that all the screw heads were strangely aligned, what an old college friend had told him a decade ago: "MLM = Most Lose Money."

That was true for most people. But, he most certainly was not *most people* – not even close, he thought. He felt certain that he could and would come up with a duplicatable, universal system that even someone with a middle-school education could do successfully. Or, so he told himself day after day.

The company that got the hook in his thin wallet was called InstaBagel. He signed up online to receive a free sample, which came in the mail three days later. The package was very neatly wrapped, and very professional-looking. He thought: *Ah, they must be a first-rate company.*

In the box, they were like hard pretzels. The instructions said to add the special flavor packet to a bowl of tap water, and then to dunk them in the powdered water. The last step: Microwave for forty-five seconds and enjoy! *Seems easy enough.* And, it was.

When he bit into the first one, he was amazed at the taste and texture. They were just like those gourmet-shop bagels – but at less than half the price. *Who wouldn't want this? I am going to be rich!*

He immediately joined at the *decision maker* level by buying \$500 worth of dehydrated bread. He could see himself rising to the platinum level in just ninety days. He thought to himself: *There's dough in this dough, bro. Big money train, here we go! My revenue-generating ship has arrived. Finally.*

However, a year later he only had two active partners in his downline, and had racked up \$38,000 in credit card debt from paying for lunches for prospects and hotel ballroom rentals for bagel-sample fests. His sure-fire plan was a complete bust – a resounding flop.

Now they couldn't even make the interest payments on their credit cards. Soon a new stack of bills began to pile up next to the medical bill stack. And now their phones were being lit

up by the bill collectors all hours of the day and night. Some calls originated from Moldova of all places.

Susan seemed resigned to imminent destitution. But as long as she had a steady supply of *oxies* – her slang for OxyContin pills, she really didn't care. If the house burned down, they'd find her charred corpse on the couch.

Her mood grew sullen and more distant. She and Mark stopped having sex. Mark didn't physically cheat on her; he went back to porn.

Susan started eating more – more of the wrong foods: the fatty ones. She gained ten, fifteen, twenty pounds. To compound the problem, she wouldn't exercise. She thought that bicycles were just for kids; she thought that running and jogging looked ridiculously stupid; she thought that walking just made you vulnerable to attacks by men and dogs; she thought gym memberships were a waste of money.

The mutual disdain for each other grew by the hour. "Why did you join that stupid bagel scam?" she would often scream. "You worthless MLM junkie!" Mark could hear her tonsils sloshing around. It was primal and beastly. It was pure detestation.

Then while watching the local 6:00 news, Mark started paying attention to a story about the history of gold in the Charlotte region. The reporter was out at the historic Reed Gold Mine, twenty-two miles east of their house in the Merry Oaks residential area of east Charlotte. The Amerasian female was talking about the German boy who found a seventeen-pound gold nugget in a small stream near

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