

## **Atlantic Canada Tales**

a sextet of short stories

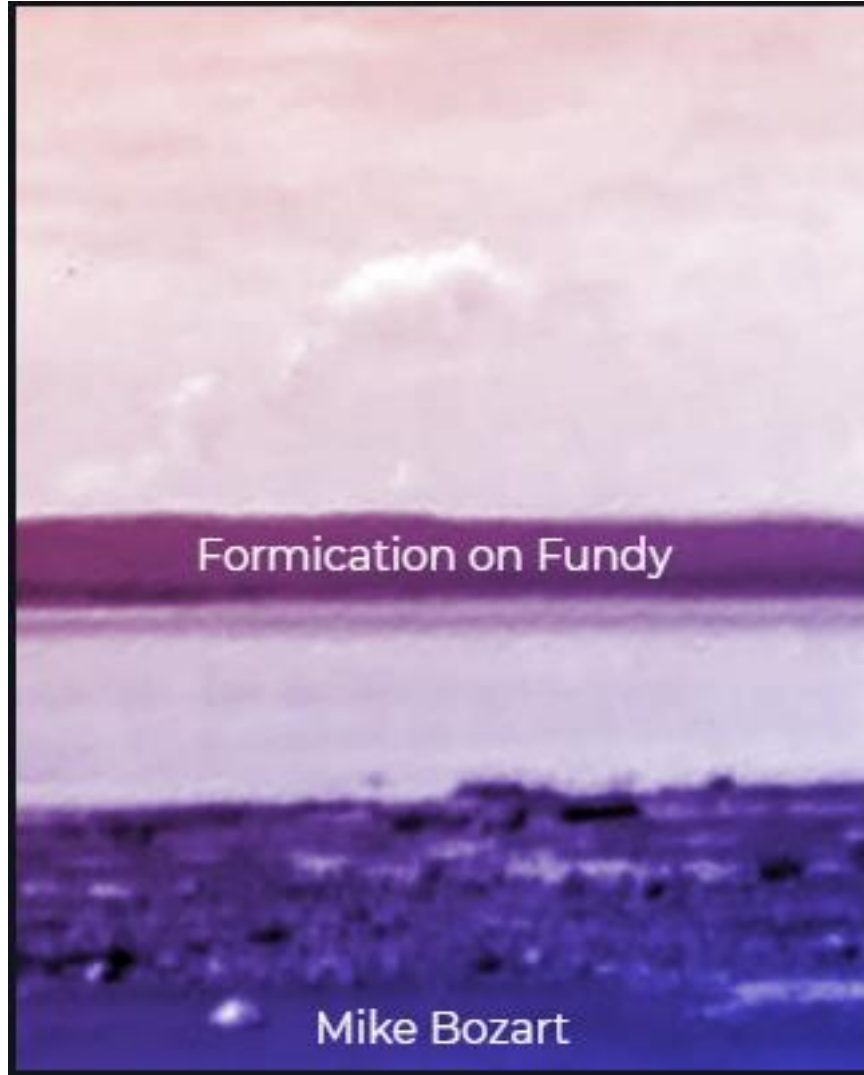
by Mike Bozart

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**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**Formication on Fundy** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | mid-April 2024

**Formication on Fundy**  
by Mike Bozart

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The north shore of Cobequid Bay across from Burntcoat Head on Trunk 2 highway. It's a snow-scattered, gusty-at-times, early April morning in 2023. Recently retired, widowed, Nova Scotian, sexagenarian George G. Gerrish IV, scratches the back of his scalp once again as he reads about his strange condition on a discounted-upon-closeout, chartreuse-shelled, dusty laptop computer.

Formication, [noun] an abnormal (imagined) sensation of one or more tiny insects/arachnids crawling on or under one's skin; a type of tactile hallucination. This term is derived from *formica*, the Latin word for ant. Known causes of formication include: (a) onset of menopause; (b) pesticide exposure; (c) mercury poisoning; (d) diabetic neuropathy; (e) skin cancer; (f) syphilis; (g) Lyme disease; (h) hypocalcemia; (i) herpes zoster; (j) neurocysticercosis; (k) methamphetamine, cocaine, or Datura intoxication and/or withdrawal; (l) withdrawal from, or sharp intake reduction of, alcohol; (m) benzodiazepine withdrawal; (n) withdrawal from SSRI/SNRI antidepressants and tramadol; (o) possible side-effect of opioid analgesics; (p) static electricity, and (q) acute phase of psychosis

George ponders the possible causes while sipping from his Halifax City SC mug of hazelnut coffee. *Well, I think we can certainly rule out (a). [internal chuckle] Can also safely rule out (b) and (c); haven't used any pesticides in decades, and no known exposure to mercury. Rarely ever eat fish from the Bay [of Fundy] anymore. And not drinking the 'blood' from analog thermometers. Yet. [internal chuckle] Boy, I'm in a silly mood today. Wonder why. Didn't eat any THC gummies. Weird. Ok, not diabetic; can cross off (d). No, really doubt that I have skin cancer at the cowlick; it's not (e). And it's definitely not (f); last time I had sex with Amélie was when? A decade ago? Probably. Why bother counting at this point? [groans] No ticks; cross off (g). The calcium/blood level is fine; therefore, strike through (h). Shingles? Nah; scratch (i). Larval cysts of the pork tapeworm? Hmmm ... a slight possibility. Better remember (j). Wonder what happened to Jay? Did he go astray? Or make a play? What nonsense I now think. Ok, not a meth-head, coke fiend, or moonflower connoisseur; thus, we can cross off (k). Woah, brightly highlight (l); put that one in 1<sup>st</sup> place – top of the list – the leading candidate. Think this is day 23 without drinking any form of alcohol. And this formication madness started about three weeks ago. Yeah, bet that's it. Wonder when it subsides. Can cross out (m); no Valium or Xanax since the Toronto days, 30+ years ago. Wonder what happened to crazy American Steve. Did he make it to Guam? Who*

knows? Lost to time. We can also eliminate (n) – nope, not on any antidepressants. Not yet! [internal chuckle] No opiates since the back surgery eleven years ago; thus, line out (o). Static electricity? Nah, haven't gotten a zap from touching a doorknob in months; the relative humidity in here is too high. Just another unlikely cause to ignore; scratch (p). And finally we get to (q). Surely we can cross this one off. I'm not hearing voices or talking to the walls. Well, not yet. [internal chuckle] So, what is the leading suspect again? Oh, yeah; it's (l). Jeez, the very-short-term memory sure aint what it was since that third bout with Covid. What day is it? [internal chuckle] No, really. Is it Wednesday? Or Thursday? The fickle-pickle lamentable 'joys' of retirement. Such a tidal bore: me now and that day then. Almost five years ago now. [Amélie, his Québec-born wife, died in a freak boating accident on the Salmon River in May of 2018.] Not sure what I'm living for now. Ok, snap out of the funk. Let's try to write that haiku poem today. Though, it seems that was on the to-do list yesterday. And the day before that. And the day before –

<ding><dong><dinggggg> Who could it be? A delivery? Have I ordered anything in the last month? Don't think so.

George makes his way to the front door from his compact den/office. He peers through the peephole. *Wow! It's Dave. [a longtime, 64-year-old, nearly bald, baseball-cap-donning friend] Why is he stopping by unannounced? Has something bad happened? Did his old car slide off the road into a ditch? / Hope I didn't spook him. But, this is the best – and maybe the last – opportunity. Wonder how George will take it. Stoically? Perhaps. Though, no telling.*

"Why, look who has stopped by unannounced at 9:37 AM on a weekday? Is this a wellness check? Those rumours going 'round are almost true." George chuckles. *Almost? He's as odd as ever. Nothing has changed.*

"No, not a wellbeing checkup, old buddy. Just got a few things to tell you." *Not good.*

"Well, step inside," George implores.

Dave enters and takes a seat on the Lawson sofa.

"Tea, coffee, orange juice?" George asks. "I would offer you a mimosa, but there's no liquor in the house. I gave up alcohol a little over three weeks ago." *Wonder why.*

"I'm fine. So, were the hangovers becoming too brutal, George?"

"Well, that's certainly a good guess, Dave. But, no, it was because the sauce was causing my ulcers to bleed." *Lovely.*

"Sorry to hear that. But, congrats on the cessation. Any withdrawal symptoms? You didn't experience the dreaded delirium tremens, did you?"

"No, nothing like that, Dave. I really wasn't drinking *that* much. Two pints of pilsner or two whiskey sours was the usual night; three was a big night, maybe once a fortnight. Though, a strange condition arose that is sometimes associated with alcohol withdrawal: formication. Ever heard of it?"

"Do you mean fornication? Are you now a blue-pill-popping sex maniac? Are you plowing The Nook and Cranny?" [a pub in Truro] Dave guffaws. *Oh, boy ...*

"Ha-ha. You've become a real funny guy in your twilight. And, no, I didn't misspeak, Dave. Formication is that bugs-crawling-on-skin sensation. Man, it's creepy as hell. And it feels so real. You would swear that some tiny insect or spider was on your scalp." *Is George losing his marbles?*

"Just tell me, George: have you been smoking meth?" [methamphetamine] Dave guffaws again. *Is he high?*

"Did you consume some happy pills for breakfast?" George ripostes.

"No, but I feel strangely liberated, mate. You see, I've got stage-4 pancreatic cancer; it's terminal, imminently. They say I'll probably croak in a month, maybe six weeks. Or maybe as soon as three weeks. But, I'm at peace with it. I'm going to spend my final days in the Vancouver area with the alone-once-again ex-wife. This is why I stopped by. I'll be leaving Maitland with my son and a vial of oxycodone within a week." *Woah! What a bomb-drop!*

"Wow! I'm so sorry, Dave. I really don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything, George. And, believe me; I really am at peace with it, completely. I never wanted to live past 65 anyway. So, I end up a year short. And that's fine by me. I just hate how the body and mind deteriorate. I'm just

not into old age. Anyway, I wanted to see you one last time.”  
*Whew.*

“Well, thanks for dropping by. Would hate to have learned of your passing years later. Hope it’s an agreeable end phase, buddy. I may not be far behind you. Say, did you ever hear what happened to Steve from Vermont?”

“He made it to Guam, married the young lady, and they had two kids. Well, as of 2008. No word since then. Now, for a morbid construction. Have you ever wondered how many people – on average – die each day?” *Where is this going?*

“No, not lately. But, I do find it odd that such number is rarely ever mentioned in the news. Almost like they don’t want us to know our insignificance.” *Zoing.*

“Well, as of last November, I saw one online estimate that put the global number at 161,803. And, you know why that number jumped out at me?”

“No idea, Dave.”

“It’s the golden ratio multiplied by 100,000.”

“Only you would notice that, Dave. Only you.”

“Ok, well, It gets better – or darker.” Dave guffaws yet again.

“Do continue.” *To God knows where.*

“The average casket dimensions are 71 centimeters [28 inches] by 58 centimeters [23 inches] by 213 centimeters. [84 inches] But, let’s focus on the total width and height; the area is 4,118 square centimeters. [638 square inches] Now, let’s multiply this by the daily-death-count number. The answer: 66,630 square meters, [79,689 square yards] a 258-by-258-meter [846-by-846-foot] square. Such could quickly dam the Bay of Fundy.” *Oh, dear. How grim. The fish and fishermen would just ‘love’ a dam. And so much for tidal-change tourism. Though, the barnacles ...*

“Yeah, that puts it into perspective, Dave. A constant conveyor belt.”

“That’s a good analogy, George. Anyway, gotta run along and start preparing for the westward departure.” Dave then seems lost in thought as he eyes a semi-abstract canvas on

the wall. “I remember when you did that one. Love those fractals. Life’s looping spirals.”

“Appreciate that, Dave. Thanks for dropping by. I hope your final days include intrigue and revelation. And ultimately, eternal peace.”

“Thanks, pal. It’s been a nice run. Though, I wouldn’t say that I wouldn’t change a thing. There are certainly some folks I wish I never wasted a millisecond on. But, all in all, pretty fortunate. Especially when I think of the extreme special-needs children that I saw at the hospital last month.”

Dave would feel death’s talons clasp 24 days later, just before sunset, in southwestern British Columbia. He would call George, as his life was down to the last hour. But there was no answer.

He then checked his text messages. There was one from George, received two days ago. *How did I miss this?*

Hi Dave,

Hope the grand finale is precisely that: grand. Any epiphanies? Do share.

Recently finished this haiku poem:

The ebb tide quickens / Grand Manan Island slips by / Maritime  
kismet

Like it? Is it too tame? Too lame? Or too much the same? Who’s to blame? [chortling]

Silt, sand, gravel, shells, and rocks. The Bay [of Fundy] floor varies at the mouth. It’s nothing like the two eastern-fork mud flats. So, how far down would those caskets settle? How long would they endure? Still scratching the scalp. No idea why. Flummoxed. Onward we flow.

George would be found dead in his basement – inside an improvised coffin – in mid-May. Cause: unknown.



**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**

## Charles of Charlottetown



**Mike Bozart**

Charles of Charlottetown by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | late April  
2024

## Charles of Charlottetown

by Mike Bozart

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“Choose a language-related topic for a persuasive piece of writing. Nothing too long – I’m not looking for literary essays or longwinded legal briefs – keep it around 750 words; 850 words max, only if you truly need to further expound or clarify. Make it a cogent argument for a beneficial change. Well, that’s your assignment. Have a great holiday recess, and I will see you back here in 17 days.” Jack Marc Collinswretch VI, the 53-year-old, 9<sup>th</sup>-grade, goateed English teacher, then sat back down at his desk. The Queen Charlotte Intermediate School dismissal bell rang seven seconds later. *He sure knows the start/stop times. Bet he has them set on his smartphone, and I bet he got a pulse-vibration alert on his left thigh at the 15-seconds-remaining mark. 3:2 odds.*

Fifteen-year-old, precocious, solitary, still-girl-shy, Shanghai immigrant Charles Chu thought about a subject to write about as he commenced his 1.4 km (.87 mi.) bicycle trek back to his family’s modest Mayflower apartment. The December 22<sup>nd</sup> (2023) Friday afternoon was mostly sunny, though considerably windy, and decidedly frigid as he set off on his 7-speed in the bike lane on North River Road.

Soon he was passing vacant Simmons Sports Field. Upon making a right turn onto Kirkwood Drive, his mind meandered back to school. *So, mister teacher wants something language-related. Hmmm ... How about the English alphabet. Yeah, but what about it? What to change? Standardize all the diphthongs? No. Too messy. And too complicated. What then? Hmmm ...*

He then gloved-hand-signaled and turned left onto tranquil Trafalgar Street, which was devoid of traffic. He continued to ponder his writing assignment. *Oh, I know – and this is ingeniously sly – well, maybe (not!): select a letter for removal from the alphabet. I’m sure there’s one letter whose absence could be covered by two or more letters. Must be a consonant. Could G or J be scrapped? They’re similar; though, J is much rarer. Or, might X be the one to axe? Or, Q? A KW digraph could replace QU. Though, there are some lone-Q-ending words. Hmmm ...*

Charles then made a right turn onto Nassau Street. Just as he passed Dunkirk Street and came up on the winter-barren soccer fields of Spring Park Sports Field, a meta-candescent light went off in his head. *No, don’t choose G, J, or X; pick C! Yeah, it seems that C is the best choice for relegation. C is*

*either impersonating K or S. Well, for the most part. Thus, C it will be. 'Sorry, C – I C U later.' [internal guffaw]*

He then made a left turn onto Queen Street. In 100 meters (328 feet), he was safely home. He locked the bike to a hidden rack and walked up to the front door.

“How was your day, son?” his 39-year-old mother asked.

“Good,” Charles answered as he kept walking towards his bedroom. “I’m going to start on my homework while the idea is fresh in my mind. It’s a challenging writing assignment.”

“Ok, son, I won’t disturb you. Your dad should be home around 5:30. He’s picking up your favorite homestyle [Chinese] takeout.”

“Oh, great! I just want to jot down a rough draft, or maybe just a notated outline. It shouldn’t take that long.”

Charles would have the first draft completed by Sunday afternoon, Christmas Eve.

On Monday afternoon, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Charles submitted the following:

Re: The Elimination of the Letter C from the English Alphabet

The English alphabet currently has 26 letters, down from 27 in 1835 when the ampersand symbol was dropped – yes, ‘&’ was an actual ‘letter’ – some interesting trivia there; the Classical Latin – and Ye Olde English – alphabet had 23; the Etruscan alphabet, 21. Twenty-six letters is certainly not an overwhelming amount, especially compared to the 20,000+ Hanzhi characters used in Chinese. But, could one of these Roman letters be banished? The answer is, surprisingly, a resounding yes! It turns out that the letter C can be dropped. If you are shocked, well, so was I, as my first and last names begin with C. Also, the name of our fine city begins with C.

Ok, without further ado I’ll begin making my case, or ‘kase’ the spelling should soon be, as the letter C’s retirement is nigh. The reasons why the letter C can, and should, be eliminated from the English alphabet are enumerated below. Now, please don’t have a konnption if your name begins with, or kontains, that 78.5% of an oval letter: C; this is merely a quasi-strategik exercisise. And just relax; it’s not that komplikated; it’s not rokket siense!

- Hard C:
  - Words beginning with a hard C, such as ‘cat’, can easily have the hard C replaced by a K (kat).
  - Words ending with a hard C, such as ‘tarmac’, can easily have the hard C replaced by a K (tarmak).
  - Words that have a hard C in the middle, such as ‘fractal’, can easily have the interior hard C replaced by a K (fraktal).
  - Words that have a double C in the middle, such as ‘staccato’, can easily have the CC changed to a double K (stakkato).
  - Words that have the -ing or -ed suffix following CK, such as ‘panicking’ and ‘frolicked’, can have the CK changed to KK (panikking, frolikked). [“The spelling will grow on you; just give it some time – weeks, months, years.”]
- Soft C: Words with a soft C, such as ‘city’ and ‘finance’, can have the soft C changed to S (sity, finanse). [“She sent in her last sent.”]
- Digraphs CL and CR: Words that begin with or contain the CL and/or CR digraph, such as ‘clear’ and ‘crass’, will have KL and KR replacements, respectively (klear, krass).
- Digraph CK: Words that end with, or contain, CK, such as ‘brick’ and ‘spackle’, can easily have the CK changed to KK (brikk, spakkle). [“Are we now in Amsterdam?” <cough>]
- Digraph CH (hard): Words with the hard CH digraph, such as ‘march’ and ‘change’, could be replaced with a new KH digraph (markh, khang).
- Digraph CH (soft): Words with a soft CH digraph, such as ‘charlatan’, can easily have the CH replaced by SH (sharlatan). Though, Charlottetown, like all proper nouns, could be allowed to keep its current spelling. [“Sign replacement would be too expensive.”]

- Digraph CI: Words with a CI digraph, such as 'financial', shall be replaced with SH (finanshal). ["Are we now in southern Asia?"]
- Digraph SC (hard): Words with this digraph, such as 'scandal', shall be replaced with SK (skandal).
- Digraph SC (where the C is silent): Words with this digraph, such as 'scene' will have the C deleted and not replaced by any letter (sene). ["Hey everyone, I just sent in my last sent without a sent; one less odorless penny on the oak dresser."]
- Trigraph SCH (hard): Words containing the hard SCH trigraph, such as 'school', will be replaced with SK (skool). ["Changing the spelling of 'school' to 'skool' is tantamount to heresy!"]
- Trigraph SCH (soft): Words containing the soft SCH trigraph, such as 'antipasch', will have the C removed (antipash) ["Yes, even on a low Sunday."]
- Trigraph SCR: Words containing the SCR trigraph, such as 'scream', will be replaced with SKR (skream).
- Trigraph TCH: Words with a TCH trigraph, such as 'match', shall be replaced with TKH (matkh). ["Woah! Where are we now? This looks eerily familiar. Who in the world is sponsoring this crazy initiative?"]
- Trigraph CTI: Words containing the CTI trigraph, such as 'traction', shall be replaced with KSH (trakshon).

Konklusion: We kan do this. Inkrementally. I will stop using the letter C. You, ever-klever reader, will also stop using the letter C. Next, he does. And then she does. Then they do. A kritikal mass is akhieved. There's a tipping point. This will surely put Sharlottetown, whoops, I mean Charlottetown (speshal exseption), bakk in the katbird seat: the resurgense of the Birthplase of Konfederation. Sure, there will be resistanse; there always is to things that shake up the stale, stagnant, stratified status quo. There's no avoiding it. Akademia will be having a major hissee fit. We should be prepared for hate mail. Nonetheless, we will gain ground, day by day. Letter by non-C letter. "Quikk! Mashine-manufacture those krushal letter-C-deletion kampaign broshures!"

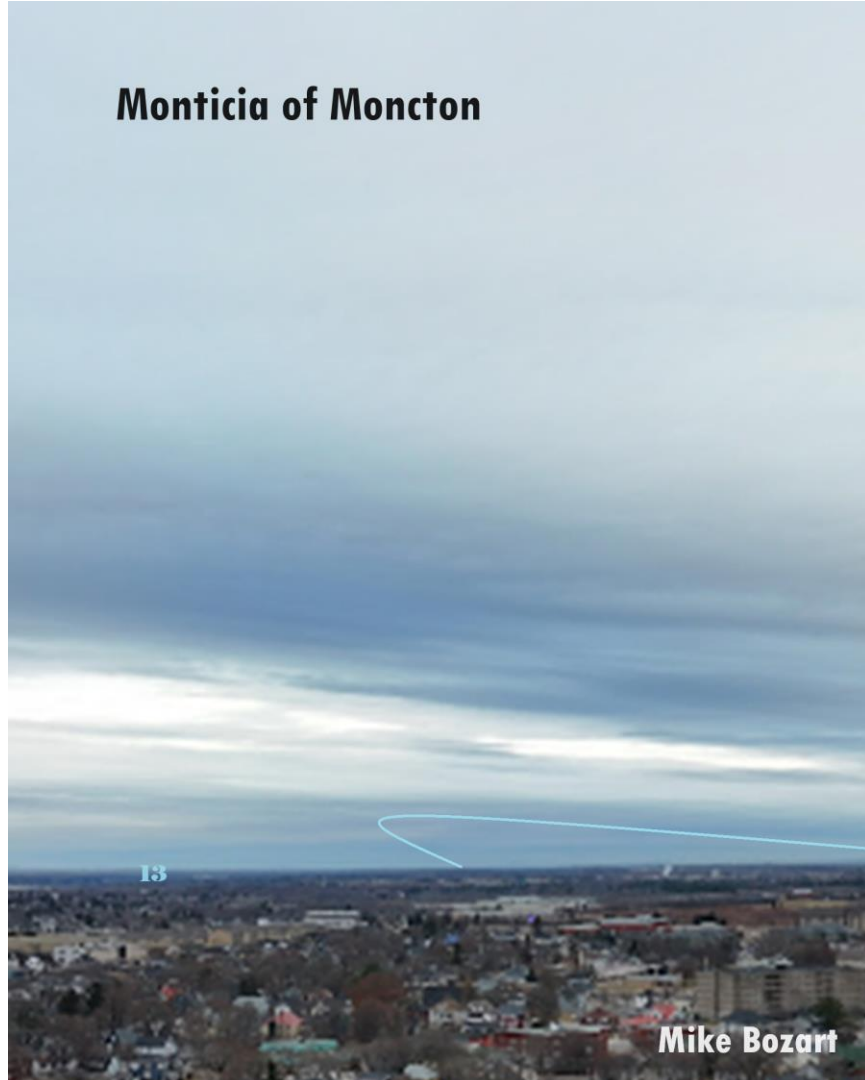
His English teacher's written reply:

Kharles, I doubt this would ever fly in Québec — or London — but PEI (Prince Edward Island) is unique. Lokal paper-airplane dissemination? Then blitz the internet? When?  
Exsellent! A+ [800 mots]

- Jakk Mark Kollinswratkh VI

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**

## **Monticia of Moncton**



**Monticia of Moncton** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | mid-May 2024

## **Monticia of Moncton**

by Mike Bozart

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It's a the-outside-air-temperature-is-mild-but-the-inner-mind-is-wild, mostly cloudy, lightly-breezed-with-memories, late-morning summer Sunday (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018) in the Old North End of Moncton (New Brunswick, Canada). Eighteen-year-old Monticia, a Myanmar (Burma) refugee, looks out her second-floor bedroom window at the very-verdant-once-again patch of woods on the opposite side of nondescript Fraser Avenue. As she finishes her lychee bubble tea, Monticia's mind meanders beyond the family abode: an unassuming octaplex apartment building. *That mini-forest [across the street] sure is dense – almost opaque. Can barely see three meters [about 10 feet] into it. Bet there's been some sexual escapades in there over the years. And I bet Marvin [her online male friend who lives 147 km (91 miles) to the north in Miramichi] would love to have a romp in there with me. Would not resist. [internal giggle] Should I email him my 'thirteenth analysis/nonsense' today? Why not? He'll probably eat it up. Bet he wants to eat me up. 'Lick away, loverboy!' [internal giggle] Loverboy ... hmmm ... It does seem like we are headed for a monogamous relationship. Finally. Can't wait for [Saturday] the 14<sup>th</sup> [of July 2018] to get here. Can't wait to hug him. Smell him. And kiss him. Just hope that we hit it off in person as much as we do in the [online] chats and texts. Though, the voice calls have been kinda lame, probably because we're both introverts. Once we break the ice, we'll be fine. Am so glad high school is over. At last. NBCC [New Brunswick Community College] starts in two months. And I'm only two blocks away. An easy walk. But must stay wary. Margie [a close friend] said that it can be 'iffy' after dusk. Can always borrow the parents' car for evening activities. Or just do rideshare. Hmmm ... IT: [Internet Technology] Software Development. Is this really what I want to do the rest of my life? Coding? Code, decode, and recode. Old code, new code, mangled code. Never share the code! [internal chuckle] Now, reboot and reload. There certainly are worse professions. Let this temporary gig remain decent. May actually grow to really like it. A permanent position? One can hope. Marvin sure is dead-set on Game Development at the Miramichi [NBCC] campus. Suppose a commuting relationship could work for 22 months. Might even be better. Won't get tired of each other. [internal chuckle] Every time he or I arrive at the [VIA Rail Canada] train station, it will feel new. Well, sure hope so. Fingers crossed as that Anglo idiom goes.*



Suddenly Monticia's smartphone chirps. It's a text message from none other than Marvin. She reads:

Good day, lovely lady. What's on your docket today?

Monticia wonders why Marvin chose the word *docket*, sighs, and then replies:

L & L: laundry and lunacy. Joking about the latter. Well, kind of. LOL. I am finishing up a zany, little, impromptu analysis of 13<sup>th</sup>s. Want me to email it to you? It's totally tabular, man! Pleasantly planar.

Four meta-scholarly minutes later, Marvin replies:

Sure! Please do. It's lucky 13 for me, babe. I've never had any bad luck with 13 or fractions thereof. None. I think uber-odd 13 gets a bad rap. All these high-rise buildings with their 13<sup>th</sup> floors signed as 12b or 14a - or completely skipped! Collective western triskaidekaphobia. So pathetic. And so weak. Feeble minds if you ask me. Well, I'll be looking for it, princess.

Monticia then cross-examines her thirteenth analysis for about an hour. At 12:12, she sends an email to Marvin just as a purple finch collides with the window pane. *Yikes! Hope that little bird is ok. Crystal-clear glass can be a hazard.*

Hey kewl dewd,

It's me as forewarned.

"Where have you been?" Just joking, bro.

Please see attached. *The 'F' Notes* were created with you in mind, Mr. Faux Sports Commentator Extraordinaire. It lines up with the other table, row by row: 100% corresponding.

Am so looking forward to our first day/date together.

Stay well, my extra-spatial [*sic*] one.

XOXOX,

Monticia

p.s. Plan accordingly.

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