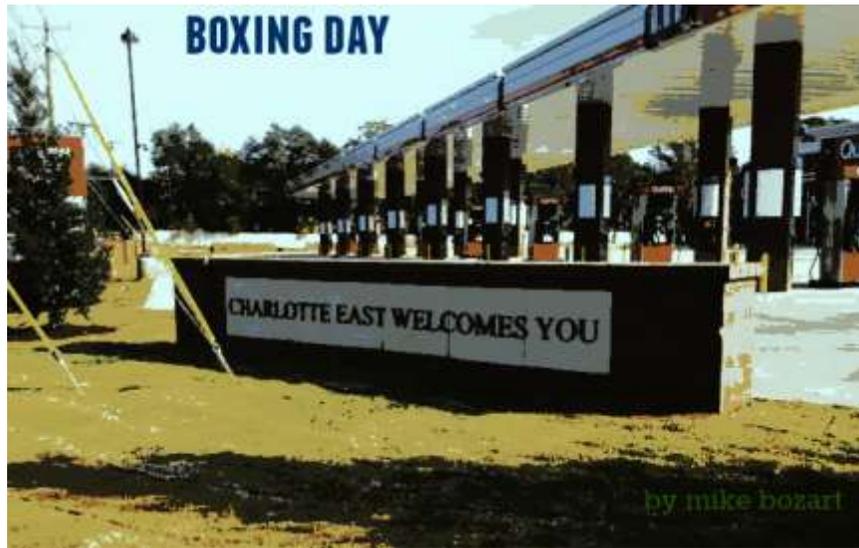


another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Boxing Day by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | DEC 2015

On an unusually balmy Saturday December 26th afternoon, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) took a short bicycle ride to the new QuikTrip convenience store at Central Avenue and North Sharon Amity Road in east Charlotte. We thought we'd just snag some pizza and a flavored iced tea and watch the traffic and count the sirens for a few minutes. Yeah, something like that.

After crossing the old Eastland Mall entrance, we rode up to the bicycle rack on the left-front of the store and dismounted. There was a thirty-something white guy with short, fading blonde hair standing nearby, intensely smoking a cigarette. He was wearing khakis and a tuck-in work shirt with a sewn-on name above the pocket: Steve.

As I finished locking up the bikes, Steve suddenly spoke.

"Can you believe how warm it is for late December?" he asked as if he knew us from childhood. *I wonder if he is high.*

"I know, it feels more like early May," I replied.

He grinned and took another drag as Monique and I went into the store. Four minutes later, we were headed out the door. As I looked for a table where we could sit down and eat our pizza wedges, I noticed that both were taken. However, Steve was the only one seated at the three-seater table near the bike rack; whereas, the other table was completely occupied.

"Let's just sit down next to that guy down there and eat," I said to Monique as we started to head towards his table.

"You think it will be ok?" Monique quietly asked.

“Yeah, he seems like a regular guy.”

Five seconds later we were at the table.

“Steve, is it ok if we sit here with you?” I asked.

“Oh, sure, have a seat. I’m just waiting for someone to pick me up. He should be here in a minute or two.”

“Thanks,” I replied as I looked at his work shirt again and tried to guess his trade. *Is he a plumber? Has he read ‘Water Hammer’? [a previous short story involving pipes and revenge] Maybe an electrician’s assistant?*

“Is the pizza any good?” Steve asked as we began to devour the contents of the triangular boxes.

“It’s ok,” I said. “Want some?”

“No, that’s ok. I just ate.”

“So, what’s your line of work, Steve?” I asked.

“Truck driver. I used to do long-haul, coast-to-coast runs, but not anymore. I rarely go out more than 150 miles of Charlotte now. Only a night or two a month away from home when I have to go to Tennessee. The wife likes it much better.”

“Yeah, I bet she does,” Monique added.

“It’s a shorter truck, too. Driving 53-foot trailers through downtowns is a nightmare.”

“I’m sure it is,” I concurred. “I couldn’t imagine trying to get a semi into a loading dock in downtown Charlotte.”

“Let me tell ya; it’s no fun – no fun at all,” Steve said.

“Any crashes?” Monique asked.

“Oh, yeah. A very nasty one last year, but not in downtown Charlotte. It was down near Pineville. A guy ran a red light, going at 70 miles per hour. He torpedoed my trailer and took out the rearmost axle. If he didn’t hit my rig, he would have killed a dozen kids on the other side of the road. That was when I decided I was done with big rigs.”

“Was the guy drunk?” I asked, feeling that alcohol had to be the culprit.

“No, not even a drop. It was kind of bizarre. The guy got stung by a wasp while working outside and had an allergic reaction. He thought that he could get to the hospital in time on Highway 51. However, he passed out just as he entered the Rea Road intersection. His foot slid down on the gas pedal. He’s still in the hospital and not doing so good.”

“Oh, man, that’s freakishly horrific,” I exclaimed. “Who do you drive for?”

“I drive for QCD. Quality Custom Distribution. We deliver Golden State Foods’ products. Ever heard of them?”

“That rings a bell,” I said. “One second. Ding. McDonald’s, right?”

“You got it. But, get this, we don’t just deliver to McDonald’s.”

“What do ya mean?” I asked.

“Golden State Foods makes the dipping sauces for most of the fast-food joints and casual dining restaurants, like Chipotle. You’ve heard of Chipotle?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve eaten at the one on Kings Drive a few times.”

“I deliver to that one, too. Well, you’ve seen the news, right?”

“The food poisoning deal?” I ventured.

“The bacteria-virus outbreak?” Monique clarified.

“Yeah, you guys got it. Now, get this: People are falsely claiming to have gotten sick at Chipotle restaurants all over the country, and then having their favorite lawyer file a multi-million-dollar lawsuit. It’s the new way for losers to get rich in America.”

“I hear ya, man,” I said. “Too lazy to work? Can’t seem to win the lottery or a major scratch-off? Sue a nice, plump, juicy, money-laden corporation. I think it all started a while back with that too-hot-for-my-lap coffee spill in California.”

“Too hot for my lap.” Steve chuckled. “Now, that’s funny, man. It’s so ridiculous, though, really. Guess who ends up paying for all of this nonsense?”

“I know: you and me,” Monique quickly answered.

“You got it. Well, I’m done with my rant. Thanks for hearing me out, guys.”

“No, go ahead, Steve,” I said. “Bang on, as they say in the UK on this Boxing Day.”

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