

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



PhragMeant by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | NOVEMBER 2016

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by Mike Bozart

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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 40th 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 yawn.*

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-*

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