

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**THE TROUT** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | NOV 2018

## **The Trout**

by Mike Bozart

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After a 22-second, unknown-source-of-a-clicking-sound wait, I cautiously turned left onto East Union Street and slowly inched up the one-way, for-a-decade-or-so-decidedly-desolate-with-seemingly-bleak-prospects-but-now-making-a-robust-comeback-with-trees-inset-into-curbside-bulb-outs, two-lane avenue in downtown Morganton (NC). I soon saw a vacant parking spot on the right. The small, silver, 16-year-old Honda Accord sedan was quickly parallel-parked. I waxed mock-self-congratulatory: *Still have the knack from those rental-car-parking-on-lower-Nob-Hill [San Francisco] days. Well, sometimes. Maybe just got lucky. Always easy when there's no pressure. [No vehicle was behind me when I shifted into R.]*

Once out on the sidewalk, the 59° Fahrenheit (15° Celsius), breezy, autumn (October 27, 2018), Saturday-afternoon-in-the-foothills air felt quite refreshing. The sky was littered with dark clouds. In a mere two minutes and forgotten change, I was entering Brown Mountain Bottleworks at 2:37.

There were only a pair of mid-to-late-20-something Caucasian dudes at the far end of the bar. I took a seat at the near end, as I figured that my 54-year-old, non-gamer self might stifle their animated conversation about Fortnite Battle Royale.

The brown-haired, black-ball-capped, early-30-ish bartender made his way over a minute later. "What are we having today, sir?" he politely asked.

"Have any dark-as-tonight porters?" I enquired. *Tonight? Another weird porter drinker.*

“Not on tap right now. But, we have a nice bottled porter from Asheville [NC] – Green Man.” *The Laughing Seed*.

“Ok, sure; I’ll go with that.”

He plucked the beer from the display chiller and popped the cap off. “Want a glass?”

“No, that’s ok,” I replied.

“Smart choice. It stays cooler longer in a bottle,” he informed. *He might be right. Yeah, that would make sense. More of the beer’s surface area is exposed to the 72-degree-Fahrenheit [22.22° Celsius] air in a glass.*

Then a husky, bright-blond-haired, mid-40-ish guy emerged from the back (perhaps from the restroom). He took a seat next to me (on my left), grabbed the wide-base, earth-brown-colored mug, raised it, and took a big swallow. *Oh, so he was sitting there. Assumed that that seat was unoccupied. Whenever one assumes ... That-to-that walks.*

After looking straight ahead and stoically drinking our grog for a few minutes, I took a chance on conversation.

“Pretty decent beer bodega, huh?” *Bodega?*

“It is. I splash in here once a week. Where are you from?” *Splash?*

“Charlotte – the east side, or *eastslide*, as some say,” I answered. “It took me one hundred and one minutes to get here.” *101 minutes? Another red-haired eccentric.*

"I've been to Charlotte many times. I used to go see a smoking-hot blues guitarist named Tom Montefusco play at The Double Door Inn in the late '90s." *What a small world.*

"Yeah, he's a good one, no doubt. And, he sure can infuse some sly psychedelia between those standard bars. Oh, by the way, The Double Door is no more – it's gone; it was razed. The community college [CPCC] bought the property. I was looking at the site just the other day from a 5<sup>th</sup>-floor window. It's just graded red clay now. It's been scraped clean. Soon there will be a multistory classroom building on that corner." [Charlottetowne Avenue at East 5<sup>th</sup> Street]

"Darn," he sighed. "Very sad to hear that."

"Well, that's Charlotte's standard operating procedure: Get rid of the old before it grows mold."

"Is that also the official city motto?" He chuckled.

I added to his laughter. "Sure seems that way. Anyway, whereabouts do you reside?" *Reside? Wonder if this guy writes.*

"The wife and I live in the Catawba River Valley about five miles [8 km] from here. We have a little bit of land with a few cows. I'm originally from Michigan. I met my wife in Ohio." *That makes sense. His accent doesn't sound very County-of-Burke-ish.*

"Wow! I just recently wrote a short story [*Taken Away*] in which Michigan's Upper Peninsula is the setting. Let me guess – you're from Detroit. Am I right?" *I just knew that he*

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