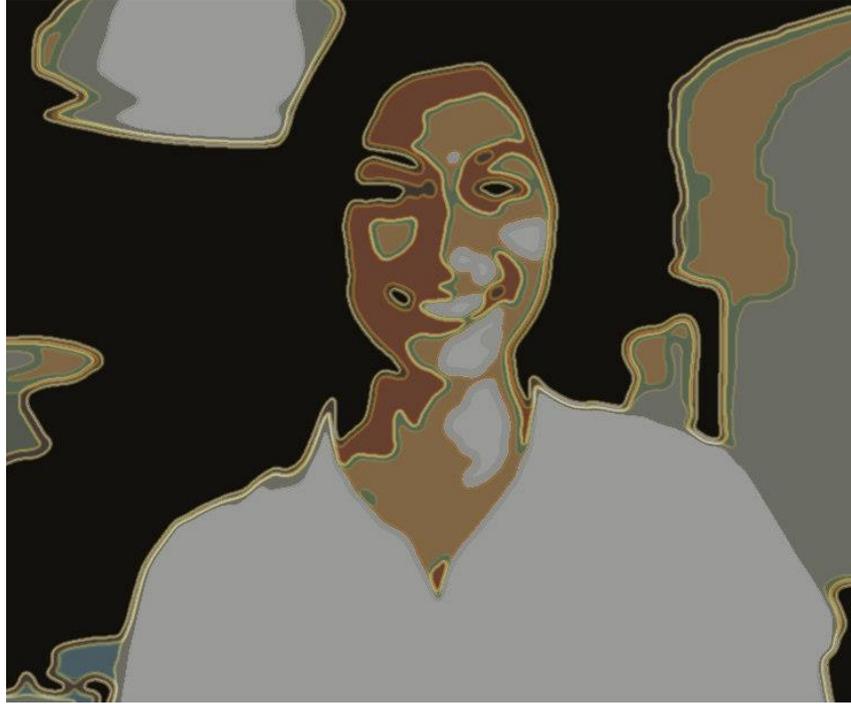


another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



The Waitress by **Mike Bozart** (Agent 33) | Dec. 2017

The Waitress

by Mike Bozart

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Friday, December 1st, 2017. It was an exemplarily mild, last-third-of-autumn day in near-uptown Charlotte (NC, USA). I had just concluded a laboratory safety meeting with the chemistry staff. Roy, the 59-year-old, Caucasian, longtime lab facilitator, then asked if I wanted to join him for lunch at a nearby restaurant. *Hope he doesn't want noodles again.*

"What place did you have in mind?" I asked him.

"How about the Mexican one?" Roy suggested, as if reading my mind. *I know that Mike will want to eat there.*

"Sure, I like that place, Roy." *Knew it.*

We then began our short, .3-mile (.5 km) trek on foot to the Elizabeth Avenue eatery. As we waited to cross Charlottetowne Avenue, we witnessed a pedestrian (a 20-ish, white, male student) in the crosswalk arguing with a left-turning motorist, but nothing serious became of it. *Everyone seems ready to explode at the drop of a hat nowadays.*

Once in the restaurant's foyer, we were quickly seated at a booth by a Hispanic young lady. Our Latina-appearing, mid-20-ish, raven-hair-with-faint-caramel-locks waitress arrived just a minute later to take our drink order.

"Just a glass of ice water for me," Roy requested.

"Same," I told her. "No cerveza fría; ['cold beer' in Spanish] I have to go back to work." I then rubbed my seemingly-forever-sleep-encrusted, 53-year-old right eye. *Why always this eye?*

“Didn’t get enough sleep last night?” she asked in perfect-sounding American English.

“He’s never really woken up,” Roy interjected. *Nice zinger. Roy goes up one-nil.*

“It’s that bottle of diethyl ether in his prep room,” I retorted. “He won’t re-cap it. The sleeping class on the 4th floor awaits a wake-up spark.” *Huh?!*

The busty waitress looked somewhat shocked. *Is this red-haired guy for real?*

“He’s just pulling your leg,” Roy then assured her. “Can I guess where you’re from?” *‘Pulling my leg?’ Must be an idiomatic expression. English is so strange.*

“Sure,” she said with an infectious smile. “I’ll give you three guesses.” *Does she know about baseball?*

“Mexico,” Roy posited first.

“Wrong, amigo. [friend in Spanish] Guess again.”

“Guatemala,” Roy then uttered in his gravelly voice.

“Nope. One strike left.” *Ah, she’s seen our national pastime. Maybe her brother played shortstop in the Dominican Republic. And now, maybe he’s in the [Baltimore] Orioles’ farm system. Why the Orioles? Where did that come from?*

Roy scraped his pale, cut-while-shaving chin. “I’m going with Peru for the win!” he announced with a burst of unforeseen verve. *That was very game-show-like of Roy.*

The waitress made a buzzer sound. “You struck out. You owe me a 25% tip.” She giggled. “Just kidding.” *Not really.*

“Well, where are you originally from?” Roy enquired. *I bet that she was actually born in the U.S. / Roy made some bad, though quite understandable, assumptions.*

“Spain – España!” she proudly proclaimed. “I’m from Barcelona. I’ll be going back for five weeks on Sunday.” *Charlotte sure is a lot more international now. Never can be sure of where anyone is from. Not so many natives anymore.*

“Ah, a Barça [FC Barcelona] fan, sí?” [yes in Spanish] I asked, fully expecting her answer in the affirmative.

“No – never!” she snapped. “I support Real Madrid. I am the black sheep of the family.” *She does seem like a contrarian.*

“Ah, la oveja negra,” [‘the black sheep’ in Spanish] I added.

“You know Spanish?” she then asked me, arching her dark-brown-penciled eyebrows. *I bet her boyfriend gets no rest.*

“No mucho. [‘not much’ in Spanish] Just had two years in high school. Sadly, I have forgotten most of it.” *¡Tonto Americano! [‘American dunce’ in Spanish]*

“What fútbol [football/soccer in Spanish] team do you root for?” she asked as she glanced towards the front. *Maybe her manager wants her to cease this conversation. / Debo irme. [‘I must go.’ in Spanish]*

“Liverpool,” I solemnly stated.

“Oh, Barcelona plucked your best player,” she declared with a surfeit of glee.

“They most certainly – and painfully – did. But, we now have this Egyptian, [Mohamed] Salah, who is following [Luis] Suárez’s path. He’s scoring goals at a good clip. His finishing has greatly improved.”

She then looked at Roy. “And, what is your team, sir?”

“Kentucky,” Roy spouted. “The University of Kentucky. The men’s basketball team. I don’t follow soccer, baseball, or the NFL. I’m from a small town in Kentucky.”

I looked at our tan-faced waitress. “In a way, you two are in the same boat: You have to hide away to root for Real Madrid in Barcelona, and my friend Roy has to watch the Kentucky games at home as this area is hostile territory.”

“Hostile territory?” she asked, looking perplexed.

“It’s UNC [University of North Carolina] and Duke [University] country,” Roy apprised her. “Those are two of our biggest rivals. But, he exaggerates – as he always does. There are many bars in Charlotte that are just fine for Kentucky fans.”

“Oh, I see,” she responded, seeming to grasp it. “I’ll be right back with your drinks.”

She would return two minutes later with a pair of clear, tall, ice-packed glass tumblers. *Is there any water in there? Ah, calm down; the ice will soon melt.*

I caught our waitress’s eye just as she turned to leave. “Being from Barcelona, what do you think of the Catalonia

independence movement?" I asked. *Hope that I didn't just ignite a powder keg. / Grrrr ...That topic! / Why did Mike have to bring up that controversial bone of contention?*

"It's a very sore subject," she admitted. "Such unnecessary chaos if you ask me. Not everyone in Catalonia is for independence. It's not 92% in favor like the pro-independence parties claim; it's more like 52%. My family is divided – as are most: My mom, my older brother, and I are against it; my younger sister and younger brother are all for it; my dad just wants stability. We don't talk about it anymore. That's because if we do, it will end up in a terrible argument with horrible name-calling, including the English word 'Francophile', which, trust me, doesn't mean a lover of all things French." *What a clever epithet! / Well, since Mike brought up this issue ...*

Roy gulped down some water and cleared his throat. "Was Catalonia ever its own sovereign nation?" he asked the quite-possibly-a-savvy-journalist-in-the-near-future waitress.

"No!" she boldly broadcasted. "Contrary to what you mostly hear in America, Catalonia has never been its own country," she passionately informed us. "The area was first formally known as the Principality of Catalonia in the Middle Ages, [the 12th century AD] and was soon part of the Crown of Aragon. Later, [the 17th century AD] it was a French-overseen republic. The four regional provinces formed a commonwealth about a century ago, [1914] and later [1931] restored their parliament. But, nationhood? Never!" *Wow! She sure knows her history. But, she conveniently omitted the [Francisco] Franco era. / I just know that Mike's impressed. I bet that he's taking mental notes for another*

short story. Or, has he been secretly recording this conversation with his phone?

“When do you think the Middle Ages will be renamed?” I asked with a wry grin. *Él debe ser un bromista. [‘He must be a joker.’ in Spanish] / Oh, brother! Mike has already started with his nonsense. Need to take him down a peg.*

“Are you some kind of wiseacre?” she responded. *She’s heard the word ‘wiseacre’? Wonder where.*

“He’s actually a very boring safety guy,” Roy insisted. *Wow! Another zinger. Roy goes up two-nil. / That should take some of the hot air out of Mike’s balloon.*

“Got to run,” our waitress suddenly said as she dashed off to the kitchen.

Seven minutes later she returned with my sopa de lima (lime soup) and Roy’s shrimp tacos. The food was just what the would-see-if-not-so-expensive doctor ordered: scrumptious fare. *Muy deliciosa. [‘very delicious’ in Spanish]*

After we were done, our Spanish server slinked over to our table once more to gather the plate, bowl and silverware.

“What’s your name?” I asked our polite, professional, attentive, and very intelligent waitress.

“Estefana,” she replied. “And, what are your names?”

“Mike,” I blurted.

Roy barked his name a half-second later.

“Estefana, I write meta-real short stories and post them on the internet,” I disclosed. *Sabía que era escritor. [‘I knew that he was a writer.’ in Spanish]*

Roy immediately pounced. “Yeah, he’s funny like that.” *Three-nil. A hat-trick for old-boy Roy. He’s really zinging the hell out of me today. Ah, but that’s ok. He’s buying. Let him fire away. Kind of amusing anyway. Hope I can remember all of this.*

“My old pal Roy is hoping to make it in comedy, even at his advanced age,” I told her to soften his gloat-filled barb. “Anyway, what message would you like to tell a person – or robot-human hybrid – existing 200 years from now?” *What did he just ask me?*

She was dumbfounded, but then her synapses fired. “Humans will be erased by 2217,” she calmly asserted. *Wow! There’s a short story here. She would be a great interview. Too bad that it’s time to leave.*

“Plague or asteroid?” Roy queried her.

“Oh, I believe that our species’ demise and subsequent extinction will be from widespread nuclear-bomb radiation,” she confidently opined. “Humans will end their own race within two centuries. Probably within one. Mars will fail. Humankind’s great achievements, all for naught. The cockroaches will win.” *She’s no airhead. Wonder what Roy’s thinking. / She’s too young to be so nihilist.*

“Didn’t expect that,” Roy divulged on our return to campus.

“Me, either.”

The following guest checks were later discovered by a 20-something Latino American busboy.

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