

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



HIS NAME WAS TED MAIZE

They don't make them like that anymore ... or did they ever?

By Mike Bozart (Agent 33)

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I (Agent 33) met Agent 8X4 (not to be confused with Agent 32), more commonly known as Charlie, at the Peculiar Rabbit in Plasma-Wigwood (in inner east Charlotte) for an after-work drink. I had something to tell him. Something that I felt that he could decipher, or at least, categorize.

We were able to get a small table on the third-floor rooftop terrace along the Pecan Avenue side railing, which offered an incredible view of the Charlotte skyline on this unusually cool early June evening. The sun was just starting to dip into the Duke Energy Building's top handle. We ordered a couple of Guinness drafts from the tattooed hipster-esque waitress. The scene was Chamber of Commerce postcard-perfect.

Charlie then led off the conversation with a direct question. "So, what did you want to tell me, Agent 33?"

"Charlie, I had a dream last night. A most unusual dream."

"Did you wake up in a wet spot?" He started to laugh at his little zinger.

"Ha-ha-ha. Very funny. No, it was nothing like that."

"Let me guess ... I was in the dream, pumping your wife with wild abandon, while you watched in jaw-dropping amazement."

"No, wrong again, sport. I hate to break it to you, but you weren't in the dream."

"Not even a cameo?"

"Nope."

Our waitress returned with our beers. Charlie winked at her, but she pretended not to notice. I thanked her and she meandered over to another table behind us.

“Well, who was in your epic dream, 33?” *Epik with a k?*

“Someone whom I have never met.”

“Someone whom you have never met? Quoi le fuque! Pardon my faux French.”

“Pardon granted, Agent 8X4.” I waved my right hand past Charlie’s shoulders, like a priest administering last rites. Then I rejoined his question. “Well, I’m pretty sure that I have never met him. He told me – in the dream – that his name was Ted Maize. He even spelled his last name for me. I remember writing it down on a form in my office.”

“Ok, do you remember how it started?”

“Yes, I do. Ted walked into my office one afternoon at the community college. He was a very neatly dressed white guy with black hair in a dark suit with a narrow tie. Age-wise, he was probably in his early 20s. Maybe about five-foot-ten in height. He told me that he was taking an international business class, and that he needed to spend at least six hours over the course of the semester talking with a college administration employee.”

“And he just picked you out of the blue?”

“Yeah, it would have seemed like that.”

“And, let me guess, you agreed to it?”

“Yep. I can remember feeling hesitant to accept initially. I didn’t want to have more of my time taken away for something that seemed less than thrilling, to put it mildly. But then I just said, ‘Ok, sure,’ in this strange dream.”

“Ok, then what happens? Does he turn out to be an anti-big-bank hacker?”

“No, nothing like that.” I swatted at a gnat circling my beer glass.

“Did you get it?”

“The gnat? Who knows?”

“That gnat would most certainly know.” Charlie chuckled. “Ok, back to your weird dream, 33.”

“Well, we started having Friday lunches together in uptown Charlotte. He would ask me questions about ethics, morals, successful communication, sustainable growth, brand recognition, promotions, project collaboration, client retention, customer service, and all the other usual business world stuff. He really wanted to be a corporate success. He was driven. He wanted an office in one of those skyscrapers out there.”

“Ew, yuck! How could you stand him?”

“I could stand him, Charlie, because he was totally genuine. He wanted to do it the right way. No cutting corners. No stepping on people. No cheating. No crooked techniques. No below-board strategies. He had this sincerely positive attitude. Believe me, Charlie; I was very skeptical of him at first. I kept thinking that this 20-something must have just attended some corporate-sponsored

motivational seminar, and was still riding that pumped-up ultra-positive high. Still on an endorphin rush.”

Charlie ran his fingers through his salt-and-pepper beard. “But, if it was just that – a motivational seminar high – it would have worn off by the second lunch. Those motivational speeches typically have a shelf-life of less than three days.”

“Yeah, I know, Charlie. But Ted never wavered. He always had the same upstanding demeanor and wholesome aspirational outlook. From beginning to end.”

“Are you sure that you weren’t being punked in your dream by Ernie?” Charlie let out a guffaw. Nearby diners looked at us.

“You know, I can remember thinking that exact thing in the dream. I know that Ernie’s got agents working on all kinds of neural-transmission devices. I did wonder if it was a setup. There was a lucid phase when I really doubted Ted’s sincerity. But with every passing Friday lunch, it was more and more evident that he was the real deal.”

“Where was he from? Did he tell you in the dream? Was he a Charlotte native?”

“He had this slight mid-Appalachian-sounding accent, so I asked him where he was originally from. He told me that he grew up near Mortimer.”

“Mortimer? Where the hell is Mortimer?”

“It’s several miles down from the Blue Ridge Parkway, off of NC 90. It’s just a little township in the woods, really.”

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