



North Coast Tales
a dectet of short stories

by Mike Bozart
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another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Eureka! by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | DECEMBER 2016

Eureka!

by Mike Bozart

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Manuel Oscar Ortiz, a 26-year-old, struggling Hispanic American actor, opened the coffee-stained, crumpled, dingy, return-address-less envelope in his cramped and cluttered East Hollywood (California, USA) studio apartment. The three o'clock December sunlight slithered through the old Venetian blinds into his kitchenette and illuminated the sheet of notebook paper. He read softly aloud:

Man, oh Manuel! Yes, finally, 'Daring' has successfully formulated Mysterium! [sic] And boy does it enhance neurotransmission inside our 3-pound [1.36 kg] intracranial jelly lobes - our brains. Dude, I inhaled a big blast last week, and let me tell you, I'll never be the same. No, I haven't become a homicidal rapist, but I have become painfully aware of humankind's fate. I won't spoil it for you; I'll let you 'see' for yourself. You won't believe it! Anyway, since I no longer trust USPS, [United States Postal Service] I hid a small container for you in Eureka. [California, USA] Let me close with these clues for discovery:

- *from the Canadian Atlantic he came*
- *easier to fell trees than find gold*
- *Queen Anne would be proud*
- *waterfront is worth the walk*
- *where the rain trickles out, I put it in*
- *on a line between turret and sign*

Manuel then carefully folded the note back into thirds and re-inserted it into the right-edge-torn-off envelope. As he held it in his right hand, his mind began to race. *I wonder who sent this. Probably Charles. Yeah, it has to be Charles. He's too paranoid to own or even use a cell phone. That's why he sent this letter anonymously. I wonder if there's anything to this Mysterium stuff. Charles claims that he's seen the fate of humankind. What an outlandish remark! But, that's just like Charles. Well, I probably won't have any work this weekend. Maybe jump a flight up to Arcata. Yeah, why not?*

Next Saturday morning found Manuel at LAX (Los Angeles International Airport), boarding an Alaska Airlines flight with just a backpack. Once in his window seat in the middle of the coach section of the Boeing 737, he looked at the cracks in the tarmac. His mind meandered. *Have to go to PDX [Portland International Airport] first. A nonstop would have been nice, but it's just too expensive on short notice. Well, the extra time can be used to start deciphering the clues in that letter. Oh crap! Where is the letter?! [It was in his left hand.] Oh, there it is. Gosh, that letter has got me so hyped-up that I'm losing my mind. Need to relax. I wonder how impressive that Mysterium mist is. Hope I can find it. Clue 1: 'from the Canadian Atlantic he came'. That could be any one of a hundred thousand gents. Hmmm Let's start with the third clue, a proper noun – Queen Anne. Let's do a Google search on Queen Anne and Eureka, California together. Bingo! The old Carson Mansion. The first two clues further confirm this. But, what does the fourth clue – 'waterfront is worth the walk' – happen to mean? I'll just get a hotel room near that Victorian mansion and find out this afternoon.*

The flight to Portland was relaxingly uneventful, save for a small boy who lost his tiny toy under his seat. Once inside the south terminal, Manuel went to a newsstand that proudly stated that they sold 'everything from porn to granola bars'. He drifted over to the map section as Nick Lowe's *Christmas at the Airport* suffused the dusty air from a ceiling-tile speaker. A cute, petite, raven-haired Latina in her early 20s looked at Manuel and smiled. *Well, there's an opening. Should I talk to her? I'm single once again. Hell, why not?*

He walked up to her, feeling insouciantly assure of himself. "Did you find something to read?" he asked prosaically, sounding a bit tired.

"No, they don't have the romance novel that I'm looking for," she said, sensing his interest in her ... or her body.

"Which novel is that?" Manuel asked, and then realized that he might be prying. *Romance novels can be like porn for women. Why am I asking her for the title? I wouldn't know it anyway. Would she ask me for the title of my favorite porn site? Let's wake up, boy. / He sure is feeling bold.*

"The title is *Kathy's Barbarian*. It's girly stuff." *I am sure that it is. / I wonder if he's a speedy pumper.*

“Would the barbarian in that novel happen to be named Ingomar?” *Huh? Ingomar? What a name!*

“No, I don’t think so. Why?”

“Oh, it’s a long story,” Manuel said with a slight sigh. *I need to hear it.*

“Tell me this long story over a tall cup of coffee, mister. I’ve got twenty minutes to kill. There’s a coffee shop next door.” *Hard to pass up an offer like this. She’s very cute and incredibly sexy. Just don’t tell her about the Mysterium.*

“Ok, sure. Why not?”

“Exactly! Why not? There’s no harm in it.” *I hope not.*

They then moseyed over to the espresso stand, ordered and took opposing seats at a 4-top table.

“Oh, by the way, my name is Lucia.” She then put her large brown handbag down in the chair beside her.

“I’m Manuel. Do you speak Spanish?” *I guess that I look more Hispanic than I thought.*

“Hardly any. I’m second generation. My family came to San Diego [California, USA] from Guatemala back in the 1980s.”

“I see. My roots go back to Costa Rica. I attended Humboldt State University in Arcata – studied acting. I’m headed back to Eureka now.” *Another movie-star wannabe.*

“Going to link up with the old college gang and burn a few blunts?” [hollowed-out cigars filled with marijuana]

“Uh, no, just going back for old time’s sake.” *That’s a lie. He would suck as a politician.*

“Oh, stop with the coyness, hombre. [man in Spanish] You’re going back there to bang your old girlfriend. Am I right?” *Wow! Why did I have to start talking to this woman? Must not be like that David character in ‘Gold, a summer story’. [the 2013 novel by yours truly] Should have never struck up a conversation with her. Need to watch my tongue.*

“No, nothing like that. So, where are you off to?” *He’s quite evasive. Something is up. It’s obvious. I should track his sly ass. I’ll drop a GPS [Global Positioning System] chip on him.*

“Actually, I’m flying down to Santa Rosa to visit a college friend. She graduated from San Diego State last May.”

“I see.” *Is she lesbian? If so, she’s definitely the femme.*

“Flying to Portland saved me \$300.”

“Same with me. I’m just here for the price break. I like Portland, though. Last time I was here, things got pretty wild.” *I’m sure.*

“You were going to tell me about Ingomar.” *Be vague.*

“A brutish fellow, I’m afraid.” *It’s useless.*

“Well, I’ve got to go now. Nice talking with you, Manuel. Safe travels.” *I’d love to see her again.*

“Likewise, Lucia. Take care.”

She then got up and walked behind him. His bright yellow backpack was almost completely zipped. Almost.

They both got on their respective flights without incident. Lucia landed in northwest Santa Rosa at 2:39 PM. Manuel had already landed at ACV (Arcata-Eureka Airport) in McKinleyville at 1:43 PM. The weather was much nicer in Santa Rosa: mostly cloudy and 59° (Fahrenheit; 15° Celsius); it was nonstop drizzle and 48° (Fahrenheit; 9° Celsius) on the Humboldt County coast.

Manuel took an uber (ride-sharing car) to the Town House Motel, a modest inn at 4th and K. He and the 30-something, red-bearded, brown-haired driver were silent the whole way until he stepped out of the car. That’s when the uber driver solemnly announced: “Good luck going forward.” *Do I really look down on my luck?*

Manuel got a room on the upper floor of the two-story building. He quickly settled on the queen-size bed and took a nap. When he awoke an hour later, it was still raining and quite gray. *I’ll search for that Mysterium first thing in the morning. The rain will have moved out by then.*

At 7:05 AM, Manuel jumped out of bed feeling refreshed. He actually had a good night’s sleep on the budget-motel bed. After a quick shower and coffee, he was out the door. The sun was rising over the southeastern ridges at 7:31. *This is going to be a life-changing day. I just know it.*

Manuel started walking north on K Street. The sidewalks were vacant. When he crossed Opera Alley, K Street became a brick walkway. And when he emerged at 2nd Street, he looked right and saw it: the impressive Carson Mansion towering just two blocks away. *Wow! What an edifice. That dude was the kingpin of the village. I wonder how he treated his workers.*

He walked up to the short, black, wrought-iron fence that ran along the property's perimeter. He stopped to read the letter from Charles again. *Clue 4: 'waterfront is worth the walk'. Well, the waterfront side is that way. The street down there is even named Waterfront Drive. Yeah, I need to go this way.*

Manuel turned left and walked to the end of M Street. There he stepped over the barricade and waded through a sea of shrubbery. Then he came to the top of a concrete retaining wall that was six to seven feet (two meters) high. He leapt down successfully. The soft earth prevented an ankle sprain. He looked at the slatted, yard-tall (about a meter high) beach fence just in front of him that ran along Waterfront Drive. *I've got myself into some kind of no-man's land. Hope a cop doesn't drive by. Where to go now? Clue 5: 'where the rain trickles out, I put it in'.*

Manuel looked back at the Victorian-on-steroids manor. He could only see the rooftop peaks and spires. Then his eyes drifted down to the seepage outlets in the retaining wall, from where water oozed out and dripped down. *Ah, these holes in this wall allow the rainwater to leak out. I bet that Mysterium container is in one of them. But, which one? Clue 6: 'on a line between turret and sign'. Hmmm ... Which sign?*

He continued walking in the lush, grassy strip until he saw a green sign to the left that read: KEEP DOGS ON LEASH

Manuel then looked back at Carson Mansion. He saw the main turret. *Maybe this is the line. Maybe it's in the hole right up there. Hope it didn't get washed away by yesterday's deluge. I guess it might be on the ground now.*

He slowly walked up to the suspected seepage hole, searching the overgrown grass as he advanced. Once at the rectangular hole in the wall, he ducked down and looked in. There was a small, black, plastic spray bottle inside. *Eureka! I've found it.*

Manuel gently extricated it from the soggy earth and fine gravels. The spray bottle had a security-sealed clear cap. On the bottom, the word *Mysterium* was in raised, thin-font letters in a spiral pattern. *Wow! This is it! I have actually found it. Can't wait to take a mighty blast. Should I do it right here? No, just do it in the safety of the hotel room, you fool. Who knows how long it lasts? You don't want to become discombobulated in this private planting strip. Don't want to alight in the town jail.*

He then turned back to face the channel known as Inner Reach and Woodley Island beyond it. A red sedan was stopped on the curb of Waterfront Drive. An unmistakable Latina was staring right at him. *Oh, gosh! It's her – Lucia. Holy crap! How in the world did she follow me here? Did she see me grab the bottle? How long has she been there?*

"Come on, Manuel; get in," Lucia entreated.

Manuel walked up to the passenger-side window. "How did you tail me?"

"Never mind. That's not important right now. Just get in and we'll go back to your motel room and get properly reacquainted. I couldn't let you get away. We're going places, baby." She winked at him and salaciously licked her lips. *She knows where I'm staying? Baby? Is she psycho?*

Manuel slowly opened the car door and crawled in. "So, you planted a tracking bug on me. Is this your usual dating technique? How long have you been doing this, Lucia?"

"We'll discuss it at the motel," she said sans emotion.

They remained silent for the final three blocks. *She's nuts.*

Lucia parked the rental car under the second floor. She then walked with Manuel up to his room. When Manuel opened the door, he was instantly conked by a long-handled rubber mallet and rendered unconscious.

He awoke 28 minutes later with a splitting headache. Both the *Mysterium* and Lucia were long gone. However, his wallet was untouched. *Ouch! What train hit me?*

Five weeks later, back at his humble East Hollywood abode, Manuel was scanning the in-state articles on a weird news website. A familiar photo was next to this shocking headline:

San Diego Woman Claims Humans Extinct by 3000

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Trinidad Head by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | JUNE 2017

Trinidad Head

by Mike Bozart

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The date was June 4, 2017 and the temperature was 50° (Fahrenheit; 10° Celsius). After walking just .4 miles (.64 km) under an overcast sky from the Trinidad (CA, USA) RTS (Redwood Transit System) bus stop on Main Street (next to a Chevron gasoline station), Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) arrived at a 5-star panorama of Trinidad Bay on Edwards Street (at Hector Street) that was postcard material to the max. Anchored fishing boats and erosion-defying sea stacks speckled the harbor. Yes, it was a Humboldt County Chamber of Commerce enticement all the way to Pilot Rock. Beyond that, well, it was hard to see. We savored this breathtaking scene for a few minutes, availing the wooden bench between two restaurant signs.

“It’s like a living nautical oil painting,” I told Monique. *Hubby loves this place.*

“It’s magnificent,” she replied. *Indeed.*

We then made our descent to the middle-aged-female-Eurekan-recommended Seascape Restaurant for a Sunday brunch. The mixed-race hostess seated us at a table that had a view of Little Head, a towering angular chunk of metamorphosed gabbro.

Monique noticed me studying the monolith as we waited for our waiter. “You want to climb that, don’t you, Parkaar?” [my ailing alias] *I just know he does. He’s almost 53, but thinks he’s 23.*

“Well, it does look tempting, Agent 32.” *He’s recording. / Frank [deceased Agent 107] would do it. I know he would.*

“I wouldn’t advise it,” our short-blond-haired, left-eared, early-20-something, assumed college student, wry-grinning waiter suddenly said as he approached on my right. “It’s even steeper and more dangerous than it looks, guys. That old rock stays damp; it’s always slippery. A dude fell off it last year and got cracked-up pretty bad. If you want to do some hiking with spectacular views, do Trinidad Head, instead. It has an awesome looping trail that is much safer.” *Trinidad? Hmmm ... That’s Spanish for Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And, this holey toast. Sure could go for a pint of 8 Ball Stout. Wholly Lost Coast. Ah, yes, they’ve got it! Boss begs to boast. They have seafood chowder, too. Gus got the ghost. Looks like a largely liquid*

early lunch for me. Mark marked the most. Wonder what Monique wants. / Yey! They have fried shrimp and scallops.

“Thanks for the warning and sage advice,” I said as I put my menu down. *Ground or rubbed? Round or grubbed?*

“No problem,” he replied. “So, where are you guys from?”

“Charlotte,” Monique blurted.

“Woah!” he exclaimed. “North Carolina. You guys are far, far away from home.”

“Twenty-nine hundred miles,” [4,667 km] I affirmed. “We’ve been staying in Eureka for the past two nights.”

“Ah, Tweakerville,” [sic] he announced. *Huh?*

Monique looked puzzled. “What is a tweaker?”

“A meth-head,” [methamphetamine addict] the knit-shirted waiter answered. “Speed freaks.”

“Oh, yes, we saw plenty of them in Old Town,” I added.

“They’re like cockroaches – so creepy and so freaking annoying,” Monique opined.

“But, unlike cockroaches, they come at you instead of fleeing,” I clarified.

“Yeah, the nonstop bummerama [sic] can be quite a drag,” he synopsisized. *Bummerama? / Nice neologism. A writer?*

“Bummerama – that’s funny,” Monique chimed. *Bummerazzi.*

“Most of them are opioid addicts as well,” he disclosed. “They usually just harm each other. They’re always getting into stupid arguments and fights with themselves. This is why I haven’t gone to Old Town in years.”

“It sure seems to have potential, though,” I suggested.

“My Native American friend’s dad grew up in Eureka,” [23 miles (37 km) south of Trinidad] he stated as he gazed at my UNCC (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) 49ers patch on my green polyester shirt. “He said that Old Town has sucked for four decades. ‘Maybe it gets better next year’ is the semi-official mantra.” *Semi-official mantra? Yeah, he’s a writer, too. Choose your words wisely.*

We finally ordered our drinks and food. While waiting for our waiter's return, I slipped a *Gold* card (a cardstock coupon for a free download of my risqué, noir-esque, 2013 e-novel *Gold, a summer story*) through a slit in the wooden wall planks. *Wonder when someone discovers it. A decade from now? Two? Will this place still even be here? Will a tsunami have washed it away? Will I be dead? Fifty-fifty odds. R-I-P, Mr. Zappa.*

Monique looked at me and shook her head. "Delayed discovery may be fine if you have time, but you don't, Parkaaroni Wankeroni." [sic] *She's already on her game.*

"I know, I know, I know. I'll leave the waiter one with the tip, asawa." [wife in Tagalog and Cebuano]

Our drinks soon arrived. Monique had her now-becoming-customary Sprite® with ice. My chilled porter was almost as good as off the tap at the brewpub on 4th Street (US 101 South) between H and G Streets in downtown Eureka.

"This is really nice, isn't it, mahal?" [love in Tagalog] I asked my raven-haired pinay (Filipina) wife.

"I really love this cool weather with no scorching sun, bana. [husband in Cebuano] Great pick, 33!"

"Yeah, I like it, too. Nice castle weather – the kind we crave."

A Latino family of four were sitting at the table across the aisle. Their exuberant young boy squirmed up to the window sill to see something. He then pointed and muttered something in Spanish. Then his dad plucked him from the table and reseated him. *Wonder what he saw. Was it that column of seagulls? / Bana is spacing out.*

Our food arrived nine minutes later. The creamy soup was tasty. Monique devoured her breaded seafood.

The energetic waiter returned just as we finished eating. "Anything else? Maybe some dessert?"

"All good here," I answered.

"No more for me," Monique replied.

"Well, enjoy your day. You guys just up here for pleasure?"

"We're on a mission – a nebular mission," I told him.

“Have you heard of psecret psociety?” Monique asked him. “It’s spelled with silent p’s. I’m Agent 32 and he’s Agent 33.” *Announcing Ernie the electronic earwig would be too much. Yeah, let it go.*

The 5’-8” (172.72 cm) waiter looked confused. “No, I haven’t.”

“Trust me, man; it’s not important,” I said with a half-laugh.

He smiled and walked away with an uncertain-about-these-two look. *Leave no coast unscathed. / Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned psecret psociety and agent numbers. Maybe he now thinks that we’re part of something unsavory.*

Once outside the modest restaurant, we ventured out on the almost-vacant concrete fishing pier known as Trinidad Wharf. Monique took some pics of the slate-blue bay, capturing Prisoner Rock and the more distant Flat Rock. Then she wanted to position me for a snapshot.

“Move to your right a little, Parkaar. I want to get one of you in front of Little Head.” *Avoid thinking with the little head.*

After she snapped the photo, I pointed to the verdant Trinidad Head, which was only 200 feet (61 meters) across a small cove. “Well, mahal, that’s the waiter-suggested hiking area.” *Kind of looks like a piece of Ireland. / Looks very strenuous.*

“We’re going to the top of that?!” Monique looked horrified.

“No, the very top is off-limits to interloping interlocutors like us. The tossed-down-belt trail winds around at mid-girth.” *He said that for the recorder.*

“Ok then, lead the way, Art Z. Sportzee.” *She said that for the recorder.*

We walked back up Bay Street to Lighthouse Road. There we made a left onto a narrow, vehicle-restricted, paved lane that passed by a loose-sand parking lot in front of a sparsely occupied, northwest-facing, finely ground, gray beach. After walking 700 feet (213 meters) and rising about a hundred feet (30 meters), there was a sharp turn to the left. To the right a hiking trail began. We took it. *Well, here goes. Hope we don’t have any health issues. / Are there poisonous snakes on this rock? Sure hope not.*

The flora was mostly maritime chaparral. The often dense, hedge-like, mainly manzanita shrubbery was up to eight feet (2.56 meters) tall. We soon rounded the northeast corner of the massive domed prominence. And then, boy oh boy, the NNW wind was howling. It must have been about 30 MPH (48 km/h).

We took a break. Soon we were being passed by a late-50-something couple. The Amerasian-appearing man was in jeans and sweatshirt. The Caucasian woman was in a pink jogging outfit. We exchanged nods and waves. *Wonder what their story is. Probably won't see them ever again. / They seem nice.*

Two minutes later we started scaling the first switchback. We took another short break in the upper hairpin bend. *Whew! Haven't hiked like this in ages, and my body is letting me know. / Hope Monique doesn't faint. Don't rush her. We're on no schedule. The whole day is open. At least until the last bus to Arcata. [15 miles (24 km) south] 4:29? Darn! Forgot to bring a water bottle for her.*

The well-worn trail leveled out after that. We then came upon a spur trail. However, Monique wasn't interested in making the hike longer. Thus, we continued on the loop trail, passing under an arch in the lush canopy.

The next flora feature was what can best be described as a cave in the thicket. It was off to our left. I peered inside, half expecting to see a homeless person in the dark chamber. But, no one was in there. *This would be an interesting place to throw down a sleeping bag and spend a night. Some surreal thoughts would surely ensue. / I bet he's thinking of sleeping in there. No freaking way!*

I looked back at Monique.

"The answer is No!" *She read my mind.*

"Not even a nap, mahal?"

"No. Final answer."

I grinned at her. *Why does he want to sleep in there? Who knows what dangerous animals live in there? Kano loko. [crazy American' in Filipino]*

In a few minutes we were looking at a carved-into-a-square-wooden-post sign for another spur off to the right. Eleven

seconds later a husky, ball-capped, navy-blue-jacket-clad, caramel-brown-mustachioed Caucasian guy in his mid-40s came marching up the branch trail towards us.

“How long is this trail?” I asked as he passed.

“Maybe seventy-five feet [23 meters] at most,” he replied. “It goes to a craggy overlook with an incredible view.” *Craggy? Is everyone a writer up here?*

“Ok, thanks,” I said.

He then resumed his hike on the loop trail.

“Well, asawa, want to check it out?”

“Sure, honey. I can tack on another 150 feet.” *150? Huh? Oh, 75 x 2. Forgot the return distance. Wake up!*

The spur trail was an easy walk. Well, until the last twenty feet (six meters). We were glad to be hands-free. *Slip not.*

After safely negotiating a four-point scramble, we were there. And, there was it. The view wasn't incredible; it was beyond incredible. We could see the waves below crashing into the flocks of rocks. Nearest and notably, Blank Rock was getting blanketed by marshmallow-cream seafoam, which streamed southward like Portuguese man o' war tentacles, blown by the fierce Aleutian wind. To starboard, Flatiron Rock was frenetically fending off the attacking sea and had no time for heat-transfer LFC (Liverpool Football Club) crest badges. And, way over in College Cove, Pewetole Island was getting a full facial to ease last September's forehead burn, whether desired or not. Moreover, all of their stoned-in-place cousins were getting a jolly cold splash. Then the fog bell abruptly clanged. *If an 8.0-magnitude seismic jolt toppled this rock and ended it all right here and now, I'd call it a bargain – a way-more-than-fair deal for me. Actually I'd be way ahead. So very lucky to have experienced so much with my shunted hydrocephalic bean. Wonderful wife. Sly son. Yet, all those tragic lives shortened by fatal diseases. Or birth defects. And, all those accidental deaths. All those innocents murdered. How does it figure into the grand equation? So many early exits. Why? How does it fit into the cosmic scheme? Is there one? Way beyond my faulty neural circuitry. There's something about this existence. Something not to be fully trusted. An amoral merciless process. But, wow! So marvelously majestic. Yeah, this is the pictorial*

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