

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**THE CLERK** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | June 2018

## **The Clerk**

by Mike Bozart

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As far as American convenience store clerks go, he was a ways from waxing stereotypical. Sure, age-wise, he fit the mold; plenty of mid-20-somethings work the center-stage-stressful, often-encircled-by-foul-mood-patrons retail gig. But he had this calm, sage-for-his-age, super-courteous, urbane demeanor. It was readily apparent that he could be employed elsewhere. *Why in the world is he working here?* I wondered behind the 60-ish African American man who reeked of booze. No, this clerk was not my-hopeless-life-is-undergoing-its-third-train-wreck distressed like his coworkers. He actually seemed like a mole from the Phoenix (Arizona) headquarters. I mused while waiting. *Maybe he's secretly surveilling the employees. Then later he transmits reports from some swank studio apartment in 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward. [Charlotte, NC] Yeah, he's most likely a corporate plant doing in-store quality assurance.*

I was now first in line at his register. The digital clock atop the cigarette display read 6:16. It was a hot-as-hell June (2017) Thursday evening and the store's air conditioning wasn't keeping up; it had fallen way behind hours ago and had resigned the contest. *How far away is October? Please let this be my last scummer [sic] in this sweathole. [sic] Let me win and get the eff [sic] out of here!*

"What can I do for you?" the short-dark-haired, Southeast-Asian-appearing clerk politely asked, noticing that I had set nothing down on the counter. *This red-haired dude doesn't look like a robber. Though, he does look like he may be from ALE. [Alcohol Law Enforcement] Nope. He looks familiar. Yeah, he was wearing a college-logoed shirt last week. He's that safety guy. Mike?*

I extracted a neatly folded Powerball ticket from my black wallet and handed it to the ever-observant clerk. *Sure hope he knows how to do this.*

"Could I replay these numbers for the next drawing this Saturday?" I asked. *Another Powerball addict. If I only had a dime for every one, I'd be sailing in the Adriatic [Sea] right now. Well, maybe not right now; it's past midnight.*

"Certainly, Mike," he replied. *Good, he knows how to do it – unlike that befuddled woman last time.*

He soon returned with a new ticket in his right hand and the now-known-to-be-a-loser ticket in his left hand.

“You want the old one?” he asked, flexing his tan left wrist.

“Nah, you can trash it,” I told him. “I’ve already recorded the numbers.” *But, it’s the same series of numbers. Another weird logger. More material for my paper.*

“Well, maybe it’s the winning line on your ledger.” *Ledger? How’d he know?*

“I sure hope so,” I replied. “I’m running out of space on my chart.” *Ah, a charter, [sic] also. He’ll be good for a page. Or two.*

“So, you’re tracking the frequencies. Are you looking for patterns?” *I’ll just throw that out to see if he runs with it. Bet he employs some harebrained strategy.*

“Just playing the least-plucked balls,” I answered. *Not a totally dumb idea. Maybe he knows some probability.*

“Sounds like a smart plan to me.” *Still a foolish venture, though. Just one notch up from completely witless.*

“Do you play any of the lotteries?” I enquired.

“Mega Millions once per moon. I just stick a toe in the water from time to time. That way I just lose a dollar. A buck a month is my high-stakes budget.” He allowed a slight grin. *Just a once-in-a-while. [sic] I bet that he lets the computer randomly pick his numbers. ‘A toe in the water.’ Maybe he’s afraid of losing his foot ... -ing.*

“I see,” I casually acknowledged. “Very smart.” *I know that he thinks otherwise. He has that gambler mindset: My method will win any day now. Such an insidious disease.*

“Ok, that will be two dollars, Mike.” *Wonder what he really thinks of lotteries. / Habitual lottery players, the stupidity-tax payers. And, he’s a technical specialist. He should know better. Maybe his friend won some money, and now he is out for his lucky strike. He feels that it’s his turn now. He’s due. Due-lusional. Another jackpot crackpot.*

I handed him two old-and-crumpled-and-somewhat-ragged \$1 bills. “Thanks,” I said as I turned to leave, noticing a now-irritated-by-the-additional-seven-seconds-of-wait-time, white, middle-aged, male, face-sunburned-despite-donning-a-plain-blood-red-baseball-cap, beer-buying customer. *A 12-pack for a Thursday night? Maybe he has tomorrow off.*

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