



a pshort pstory by Agent 33 (Mike Bozart) of the psecret psociety
written February 2015 (revised April 2016) | Charlotte, USA

Fred Wozinski had recently moved from Brooklyn to Charlotte. The twenty-five-year-old Caucasian IT tech had scored a plum gig with an uptown data analytics company. He was liking his new town, and had even met a local girl at a bar in the century-old Elizabeth neighborhood, where his apartment was conveniently located.

One quiet Saturday winter afternoon, while unpacking the remaining boxes in the guest bedroom, he opened the small closet door to check for available storage space. Luckily, it offered up enough room to push those never-seem-to-get-opened boxes inside.

Before closing the closet door, he noticed an odd, slightly raised, rectangular shape under the ancient beige wallpaper, about five feet above the pockmarked hardwood floor. For a moment he wondered why anyone would want to wallpaper a tiny closet. Then he ran his left hand over the offset surface. It felt like metal underneath the wallpaper. He then wondered if the closet had an overhead light at some time in the past, and if this was where the switch once was.

He felt the area of relief closer, detecting what seemed like a keyhole. He ran his left index fingernail vertically over it to confirm his suspicion. Curiosity then got the better of Fred.

He retrieved an Xacto knife from his little gray tool box (that was actually a converted tackle box), and began to neatly cut out the 2" x 4" rectangle of wallpaper over the raised object. After cutting right along the edges of the protrusion, he picked at a corner of the cut piece of yellowing wallpaper, trying to peel it back. The backing adhesive had lost most of its hold over the years; the wallpaper cutout was quickly removed, revealing an inset, black, tin box. There was a door on it, and sure enough, it was locked.

However, Fred wasn't going to stop now. He found a large paper clip on his desk and began to reshape it. Seventy-seven seconds later, his impromptu skeleton key had tripped the little lock's single tumbler. He pulled the door's left edge open with his fingertips. Inside there was a severely-browned-by-age piece of paper with cursive handwriting, folded into sixths.

Fred cautiously retrieved it and brought it into the living room where there was more light. He carefully unfolded the little note. Some small edge pieces of the old paper crumbled off. Fred then flattened the note on the coffee table. He used his granddad's old magnifying glass to read:

February 5, 1929

About four inches of snow fell today in Charlotte. My friend, Jim Royster, seemed to think that it might set a record for this date. Well, I guess you can check on that in the latest weather almanac (do you still have those?). A slow Tuesday. Work at the lumber mill ceased, so I came home early with a novel idea in my head. I would begin a little short story (yes, you are reading it right now!) and later hide it somewhere for someone to find (i.e., you!) at a hopefully much later date. A date after I'm dead and gone. Yes, I'll hide this piece of paper somewhere that will be found after my imminent passing. You see, my heart is failing me, even though I'm only forty-nine. My dad died early – only made it to forty-five. But, back to this noteworthy endeavor. I wonder who will find this note (who are you? what is your life like?), and exactly when will they (you) find it (is it the 21st century now? did this little note stay hidden that long? is it still legible?). Well, you've found it, serendipitous reader. Now it's your turn to add a paragraph or two. Go ahead; don't be the one who severs the tale. It'll be the longest 'short' story ever written, because it will never end. I have the utmost faith in you. I just know that you're the type to continue this time-traveling missive. Transfer my words onto your paper (what kind of paper do you now have?) and add two hundred more! Credit, date, then hide.

Mirth and mystery,

Dave Adst

Fred nearly spit out his hot Herbal Gerbil tea. He was quite shocked by the curious little note. He immediately googled the keywords *Dave Adst* and *Charlotte, NC* and learned that Dave did indeed live on Lamar Avenue in Elizabeth; was born on January 23, 1880 and died of cardiac arrest on May 17, 1929.

Fred was now even more intrigued by the old note that gave instructions for its survival. He then researched Jim Royster, and saw that one Jim Royster from Charlotte died on July 19, 1934 of consumption. Fred thought: *Wow, Dave didn't experience the October '29 stock market crash or the ensuing Great Depression; it was all the roaring 20s for him. But, his buddy Jim sure did. I wonder if they are aware of me now, at this moment. Well, what should I do? This is too good not to continue. I could make a dozen or so copies to hide around Charlotte. That would greatly increase the chances of this story continuing after I'm dead. I'll place copies in nooks, crannies, cavities and voids that won't be breached by my contemporaries. I'll make sure that the notes won't be found until the buildings are razed. Wait, is that 'too' hidden? Hmmm ... I wonder if Dave wrote more than one note. Are others already playing this paragraph-*

every-eighty-six-years short-story 'game'? Hmmm ... I should google the note's exact words. Verbatim.

Fred then did just that on his tablet computer, but nothing came up related to Dave Adst.

Fred's mind started to churn some more. *Ok, maybe this is the only such note that Dave wrote. Ok, what in the world should I write? He asks for a paragraph or two. Two hundred words. Hmmm ... I know – I will just mention the note's discovery, today's weather and my job. Must remember to date it.*

Fred then transcribed Dave's text onto a white sheet of 20-pound printer paper and then added a succinct, six-sentence paragraph, which read:

Hello fellow note discoverer!

I found the above note today – today being February 7, 2015 – in a hidden wall compartment in my Lamar Avenue apartment. I initially thought that the inset metal compartment was a light switch junction box. Boy was I surprised when I opened the locked door to find Mr. Adst's message from 1929. And, who was the US president on February 5, 1929? Why, it was still Calvin Coolidge for another month. (Herbert Hoover was sworn in on March 5, 1929. And, yes, I had to look it up.)

Well, weather-wise, no snow today here in Charlotte. A cold below-freezing start to the day (frost on the grass), but I think it will warm to the mid-60s.

As for my occupation, well, I don't work in a lumber yard. No lumber yards around here anymore. I work in the IT (Information Technology) field. I don't think that Dave would have been familiar with that. And, if this note is found five-plus decades from now, I'm sure that I'll have no idea of some of the job fields in your present time.

Well, serendipitous note reader, let's not disappoint Dave. Add your two-hundred-word addendum and hide strategically. Lengthen his legacy.

Enigmatically,

- Fred Wozinski

Later that day he made thirteen copies of the newly expanded tale. He folded and rolled them, and then placed

each one in a 35mm film canister. Before placing the cap back on, he applied a thin bead of silicone sealant to keep water and moisture out.

That evening he began hiding the encapsulated, scrolled, two-note short stories. He hid the first one in the tin box (but kept Dave's original note). The second copy went into a picnic table's seat pipe in Independence Park. The third, in a wall crevice behind Starbucks on East 7th Street at Pecan Avenue.

And the strange wandering Asian lady ... well, she saw him.