

**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)**

[Feb. 2014]

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.”

Another waitress with long brown hair noticed that our glasses were nearing empty. “Two more dark ones, guys?”

“Sure,” Charlie quickly answered for both of us. *I guess I’ll be here for another forty minutes. Oh, well. Nothing on the docket tonight.*

I continued to recount the strange dream. “Ok, when Ted said Mortimer, I immediately recalled hiking in that area of the Pisgah National Forest in the mid-’90s. I always thought it was pretty scary – the locals, that is.”

“A setting for a Deliverance remake?”

“Yeah, that kind of scary; though, it’s beautiful country, geophysically, and I imagine most of the people there are fine. But, if you’re alone out there when the sun starts to go down, even an inveterate atheist will pray like a moonshined preacher for their engine to start when they turn that ignition key.”

Our waitress returned and placed two more glasses of Guinness draft beer down, retrieved the empty glasses, and then gave me a cautious look, rolling her eyes towards Charlie (who did not see this), as if to ask ‘is he ok?’ I just nodded. She promptly split, disappearing down the stairway.

“I heard that, man.” Charlie laughed for a couple of seconds. “Hey, I bet this Ted character has handled the serpent.” He laughed again.

“Ironic that you should mention that, Charlie. I always tried to steer our lunch conversations away from religion and politics in the dream, because I truly feared where they might go. I didn’t

want to end up in Awkwardville with that penguin. I really wanted to keep it on business topics only. However, on the sixth lunch – I believe it was the sixth one – we saw this apparently demented homeless man on the Square (the center of Charlotte) with a cross on his shoulders, spewing off verses from the bible. Many were misquotes. I believe he was even interjecting whatever came into his mind. Well, Ted just looked at me and said, ‘I can’t laugh; I once kissed a rattlesnake.’ And then as we walked down South Tryon Street a few blocks, there were about a dozen people protesting in front of the Duke Energy Building. He looked at me and said something about the responsible company must never ignore unfavorable comments, reviews or opinions. He went on to say, ‘they need to dig to the root cause and fix it if need be’ and then he said ‘the corporation must maintain a truly stellar image and reputation, not just a fake PR veneer.’ It wasn’t exactly what I was expecting him to say. I remember at this point in the dream, really starting to wonder why I was having such a dream.”

“Well, this Ted guy sounds like presidential material.”

“Yeah, really. I know. But, I don’t think Ted Maize would ever make it in the world of politics, Charlie, because he had zero tolerance for manipulation, much less corruption.”

“But, wouldn’t the ruthless corporate world just spit him out the other end? His approach seems way too naïve to succeed.”

“I wondered this, too, Charlie. But, after every lunch I found myself thinking that he was probably smart enough to negotiate the minefield of office politics. I could see his managers being afraid to fire him, for fear of an expensive lawsuit, or loss of their

own jobs. I could see him quickly being über-connected and highly networked.”

“Your Ted guy almost sounds like an alien in human form. In your dream, did you ever wonder if he was really from some other planet, or controlled by some programmer? Did you ever notice a compartment door behind his neck or wires sliding out of his sleeves?” Charlie chuckled aimlessly. He was obviously inebriated now. *He probably started drinking long before he got here.*

I chuckled, too. “No, I never noticed any wires, doors, diodes, chips or transistors. I never doubted him being human. Well, maybe for a few seconds every now and then. But, man, he sure was polished for his age. And you know me, Charlie; I’m pretty skeptical of these types after being burned in *can’t-lose* MLM deals. But I could never find a chink in his thin-lapelled rayon armor.”

“What about his personal life? Did he date his cousin?” Did that ever come up in your dream? I bet that would explain a lot about his character.”

“It did come up on the second lunch. He said that he was engaged to a sweet girl from Gastonia. In the dream, he showed me her picture. Blonde hair. Thin. Cute. About his age. He said that she worked at a beauty parlor off of US 321 near I-85. He said that they met at Gaston College.”

“Well, nothing unusual there.”

We then heard some chairs moving behind us. Our waitress was back in our area, trying to set down several plates of food. When



she had successfully served the table of six, she asked us if we needed another beer. Charlie agreed to have one more, but I passed and opted for ice water.

“No more suds, 33?”

“No. Time to wind it down. My luck I would hit a roadblock on Commonwealth. A DWI for just 0.08 would truly suck.”

“I agree. I’m on foot tonight. Our girl is really working hard now.” Charlie now had a constant toothy smile.

“Yeah, waiting tables is tough work. I don’t think I could do it, Charlie.”

“Me, either.”

Our waitress soon returned with a foaming-over Guinness draft and an ice water. We thanked her. Then Charlie had something to ask her.

“You don’t know a Ted Maize, do you?”

“No, I can’t say that I do. Sorry.”

“No problem. Just checking.”

She gave Charlie a curious look and departed for the next table.

“That was bold,” I said, somewhat shocked by his question to our waitress.

“Listen, I had to make sure that you weren’t setting me up, 33. I’ve heard about your mind games. All of the agents have.”

“Setting you up? I think you lost me there, bud.” I chortled.

“Ok, so how does this Ted dream end? Do you both get run over by a CATS bus with faulty brakes on Fourth Street?”

“No, there was no gory, mangled-body ending, Charlie. No Hollywood explosions. No heroic end-of-saga music.”

“Wait, I think I’ve got it figured out: Your wife, Agent 32, placed a chip behind your right ear while you were asleep as part of a research project. Am I right?”

“How did you know?!”

“Really? That’s it? I guessed it?”

“Hell, no! Give me a freaking break. You’ve lost your last marble.”

“Ok, ok, ok. So, how does this Ted dream end?”

“Can you be serious for a minute? Or, are you too sauced?”

“I’m mouth-shut and ears-open, pal. Finish your yarn.”

“Ok, after our final lunch, Ted and I just diplomatically shook hands and wished each other well. We exchanged e-mail addresses and phone numbers, and promised to stay in touch. But, apparently, we didn’t. Then, ten years later, I’m in my office at the community college, sifting through the morning e-mails when my desk phone rings. The caller ID screen reads: TED MAIZE. At first I am incredulous. Then I reach for the handset with my right hand. That moment ... why, it had such a real feeling. I can still see my hand going towards the phone in slow motion. I grab the cold plastic and place the handset up to my right ear. Three

seconds slowly pass. I am mute; I can't speak; however, the caller can. The male voice says, 'Hello, it's me – Ted. Agent 33, you are never going to believe this ...' And then I awoke with the phone in my hand."

"Check, please."