



TWO TALES FROM JERNIGAN

BY MIKE BOZART

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



FERN PARK MAN by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | SEP 2016

After a lively late lunch (the first NFL Sunday of the 2016-17 season) and engaging conversation with Agent 37 (Dave) at the Altamonte Springs (FL) Duffy's Sports Grill, we headed across the multilane boulevard to the Lynx bus stop. About a half-hour later, Agent 32 (Monique) and I (Agent 33) were boarding a green bus (route 436N). We soon arrived at the Fern Park Superstop, a nondescript bus shelter where four lines meet.

"Well, this is where we change buses, Monique." I stood up and resituated my green backpack in the aisle.

Monique, sitting next to the window, then packed her smartphone. "What bus do we take to get back to the condo in Casselberry?"

"The 436S. It should be here shortly."

Sure enough, a pink 436S Lynx bus pulled in behind the bus that we were on just two minutes earlier. We quickly boarded it to escape the steamy Florida heat and blazing sun. (These buses have good air conditioning.)

The driver allowed eight more people to get on. Then he walked out, closed the door, and went off to presumably get something to eat and/or drink.

"How long will he be gone, Parkaar?" [my ailing alias]

"Probably not that long. Maybe five minutes, Agent 32."
Agent 32? I guess he brought that darn digital audio recorder with him from Charlotte. He's such a sneaky thing.

Our gaze soon focused on a conversing pair of waiting passengers: a skinny, 30-ish, light-brown-haired, extremely tanned Caucasian lady and a wobbling back and forth (most likely drunk), husky, ball-capped Caucasian dude in his late 30s. The duo were standing thirteen feet (4 meters) from the bus-stop sidewalk on the edge of a motorcycle-driving-instruction parking lot behind a jai-alai building. *What an unforeseen pairing. Wonder what their stories are. Did they know that they would meet here today and be in a future short story? Probably not. But, as they now have ...*

We couldn't hear a word they were saying, but their body language was amusing. The man would lunge forward when he spoke. Then the lady would smile, laugh, and flap her hands about. When she would reply, he would stumble backward. We watched this go on for six or seven cycles. *Gosh, she's so unnaturally thin. I bet she's on crack. He's drunk and trying to pull a date, but he couldn't even pull his sausage out in his condition. / She's a crack whore, I bet. Dude smells an easy lay. He's stumbling in for the thrill. She's just sizing up his wallet.*

Then my attention shifted to a silver-haired, bronze-faced gentleman in his 60s. He was wearing a thrift-store-looking plaid suit, a yellow dress shirt, tweed slacks and brown loafers. He was totally oblivious to the inebriated pair six feet (1.83 meters) behind him as he sat on what appeared to be a milk crate. *He must have earplugs. Or, maybe he's deaf. He still hasn't even acknowledged the intoxicated tandem behind him.*

He had his routine, too. He would stare out to his left for maybe ten or so seconds, look down, rub his eyebrows, and

then rake his right hand through his long bangs. Then he would look up at the sky and sigh, before looking back down at the sand in front of him. *He must have had a major financial reversal. Something big went bust. But, he still has his dignity. Even if now destitute, he's not going to go around looking like a bum. He still has his pride in this sauna-like heat. I wonder if I'm on the right track with my hunch. He would be one interesting interview. He's a living novel.*

On his third iteration, Monique noticed me studying him and not the other two. "That man sure seems pensive. What do you think is on his mind, Agent 33?" *Maybe some of the bus passengers heard that. Hope so.*

"I'm thinking that he's replaying 2008 in his mind, Agent 32. He must have lost it all. That's when the Great American Recession began, Monique. Though, some back it up to late 2007."

"He is certainly troubled by something, Agent 33. That's for sure."

I looked back at him just as he looked skyward. "I can tell that he had it all within his grasp and that it suddenly slipped away."

"Maybe his business venture suffered a Gerrard slip."

"Maybe so. That would be the worst, and would explain it. He's a haunted man now. Probably all the way to the grave. But, as for Liverpool, they sure looked good yesterday against Leicester City at the enlarged Anfield."

“We finally met Kerry and the Orlando group at The Harp. That was a fun time, Parkaar. You know, that old man looks like the guy at Lake Eola.” *Huh?*

“You saw him yesterday, 32?”

“Yes. Or, someone who looked just like him.”

“Oh, I must have missed him.”

“Because you were hiding in the shade, Parkaar.”

“I can’t deal with the Florida sun, Monique. My skin just wasn’t designed for this climate.”

Monique then looked back at the old man, who was now looking down again. “Maybe his wife died recently, 33.”

“That could be the case, 32.”

“I really think so.”

I caught the old man sighing again. “Something is really eating at his psyche.”

“I feel sorry for him, 33. Maybe his whole family has abandoned him.”

“Maybe he had no family, Monique.”

“Ah, that’s so sad, Parkaar.”

“Or, maybe he’s just dreading the arrival of the 102 bus that will take him back to his assisted-living center in Winter Park. Maybe he despises the routine there.”

“It’s kind of fun trying to guess what people are thinking; isn’t it, Agent 33?”

“It is as long as one is in a cool-enough-to-think place, Agent 32. If we had a thought interceptor like the one mentioned in *Galax_ Galaxy*, [a short story from 2012] we’d be rich.”

“Or, dead.” *Quite possibly.*

Then the old man rubbed his right eye as the 436N and 103 buses pulled away.

I then saw our driver quick-footing it across the parking lot with a pizza box in his hands. *Ah, so he went to Venice. [an Italian restaurant a block away] Looks like it took too long. / So, our driver went out for pizza on his break. I wonder if that pizza is any good. The one from New York Pizza, Baby was just average the other night.*

The stocky Cuban American bus driver passed the improbable pair and the old man. He opened the front door of the bus and set his pizza box down next to the fare box. The driver turned and smiled at us. “Did everyone have enough time to collect their thoughts?” He chuckled to himself. *What a joker. / Maybe his girlfriend works at Venice.*

Our bus driver then sat down, buckled up, and opened the front door for the eleven waiting passengers, including the delirious duo. *All aboard. All a-bored a board. Jeez, what am I thinking?*

Before we pulled away from the curb, the 102 bus – which had parked behind our bus, completely unbeknownst to us – passed our bus and headed for US 17/92.

The old man was still sitting on the milk crate. He was still going through the same series of mannerisms. *Well, he didn't care to get on any of these buses. Maybe he's suffering from some form of dementia. How sad. / That old man is still just sitting there. I can tell that he is 'buang'. [crazy in Cebuano]*

The bus lurched forward. I saw the old man stand up. He waved to the bus (and to us?), and started walking towards Oxford Road. *How odd. Does he just like to watch people get off and on the buses here? Very strange. Probably some mental issue. / I bet he and his wife used to ride the 436S bus. Maybe that's it. Poor old man. I really pity him. I wonder what becomes of him. Where does he live?*

Our bus made the half loop with a right on US 17/92, followed by a right on Semoran Boulevard (State Road 436). When we came to Oxford Road (on the right), I looked down it, hoping to see the old man in the plaid suit. However, he was nowhere to be found. *Maybe he slipped into that corner convenient store back there. [Pelican Discount Beverage] I really doubt that he went in the nail salon, [CCS] recording studio, [Real Feel] or that vacuum cleaner repair shop. [B&C] Ah, maybe he slipped into that massage parlor. [Star Massage Therapy] Yeah, the old sly dog. A happy ending to close out the day. Maybe he was secretly taking mental notes on everyone for his novel. Maybe Monique and I will be in it. What an insane thought. Need to lay off the granules. / I wonder what nonsense my agent-in-space-time husband is thinking now. I'm sure that I'll read about it soon.*

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AN ORLANDO SATURDAY by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | SEP 2016

This particular Saturday – September 10, 2016 – started at the McDonald’s on State Road 436 in Casselberry (Florida, USA). Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) were sitting, sipping our McCafé coffee concoctions at 7:47 AM, when Steve, Monique’s 39-year-old pinoy (a male Filipino) brother walked in the side door of the fast-food restaurant.

“Hey, bro, we’re over here!” Monique shouted to Steve.

Steve walked over, hugged his younger sister, and shook my hand. He then sat down across from Monique and me.

“Steve, would you like something to eat or drink?” I asked. “It’s on me.”

“Uh, sure,” Steve replied. “Maybe just an egg biscuit and some coffee.”

I went up and ordered while Monique and Steve chatted away in Cebuano (the dialect spoken in Siquijor).

When I returned with the food and beverage, Steve was patting his forehead with a hand towel.

“It’s just as steamy as Manila; isn’t it, Steve?” I posited.

“Yes, it’s about as hot,” Steve said. “It’s not even 8:00 AM, and I was sweating while walking over here from my apartment across the street.”

“Well, Orlando does cool off, bro, unlike Manila,” Monique stated.

“Yeah, just wait until November, Steve,” I added.

“I’ll be gone early Tuesday morning,” Steve announced between chomps.

“Wow! I’m glad that we came down here this weekend,” Monique said.

“Where are they sending you, Steve?” I asked.

“West Texas,” Steve replied. “Some little Podunk in the middle of nowhere.”

“Say, did Ernie give you a [psecret psociety agent] number, Steve?” I inquired. *What?*

“Not yet,” Steve answered.

The conversation died. Monique and I finished our java infusions as Steve devoured the final third of his biscuit.

Thirteen minutes later we were at a bus stop on the other side of Semoran Boulevard (SR 436). We were able to wait in the shade, as the eastern sun was still low in the sky.

“So, where are we going again?” Steve asked.

“The Harp & Celt in downtown Orlando,” I replied. “They’ll be showing the Liverpool – Leicester [City] game. They’ll have a ten o’clock game on before it. It should be fun. They are expecting us.”

Right then a 20-something Hispanic dude on a fixie (a modified single-speed bicycle) passed us on the sidewalk. “Fanks,” [*sic*] he muttered as we moved aside.

The Lynx bus came eight minutes later. We boarded and sat in the middle, on the left side. The bus was only 20% full. Traffic was still light.

Soon we were at the Fern Park Superstop, which was just an ordinary bus shelter where four local bus routes began and terminated.

“Well, time to switch buses,” I announced. *I hope we get on the right one. His thinking in the morning is not the best.*

“Which one do we get on, Parkaar?” [my ailing alias] Monique asked.

“The bus in front of us – the 102,” I answered. *He had better be right. I don't want to end up next to an alligator pond.*

We all rose from our seats and marched off the bus. We then sat down in about the same place on the 102 bus. *I wonder how long it will take to get to downtown.*

Just as the bus started to pull away, a 25-ish, tanned, sandy-blond-haired, shirtless lad with a long wooden skateboard, banged on the front doors. The driver stopped the bus and allowed him to get on. He sat down on the right, a few rows in front of us. He seemed very agitated; his head kept twisting back and forth. *Is he on something? / He sure is acting odd. / Stange kano [Filipino slang for American] there.*

Four stops later he got up and exited the bus. Once outside, he turned to the driver and asked, “Will another bus be here in twenty minutes?”

“That sounds about right,” the somewhat obese African American female bus driver said.

As our bus pulled away, I saw him with this very confused look on his face. *I wonder what he's on. He seems extremely disoriented. It's like he ingested a box of Marezine tablets. [an over-the-counter motion-sickness medication that can cause delirium in high doses]*

We were soon winding through Winter Park. I suddenly remembered that a long-brown-haired girl that I once worked with at the Pier 1 Imports store on East Independence Boulevard (now razed) in Charlotte (NC, USA) went to Rollins College. *So, this is where Caroline went to school back in the mid-80s. I wonder what became of her. Hmmm ... maybe she became a potter.*

Five minutes later and the bus was in Orlando proper. We lumbered towards downtown in silence. Soon we were disembarking at the Central Lynx station.

We meandered around the downtown area, occasionally stopping to take pictures. Eventually we alighted on Magnolia Avenue and started walking south towards our destination.

“Well, guys, we have a lot of time to kill; we're way ahead of schedule,” I announced. “It's only 9:53. Our game's kickoff isn't until 12:30. Let's look for a coffee shop to duck into.”

“A coffee shop?” Monique questioned. “We just had coffee.”

“Hey, there's a lake over there,” Steve said as we were crossing Washington Street.

“Ok, let’s check it out,” I said.

Once across the street, we turned left and strided down to Lake Eola (just two blocks east).

I walked up to the primary bronze-plaques monument. “This is Orlando’s first city park,” I shouted back to Monique and Steve. “It was established in 1883.” I then pointed to the large fountain in the middle of the large pond. “The fountain was added in 1957.”

“Thanks for that report, Agent 33,” Monique said with a grin.

The sun was well above the tree line now. It was in a three-letter word: Hot! I found a shady spot near the band shell and sat down. Monique and Steve followed suit.

“What is that for?” Monique asked, while looking back at the band shell.

“It’s for music and theater events, Monique.”

“Is there an event today?” Steve asked.

“I don’t think so, Steve,” I replied. “Just lizards humming about the stage.”

“A reptile rhapsody?” Steve suggested, and then chuckled.

I laughed for a few seconds with him. “Seriously though, you don’t want to get in any pond, lake or creek in Florida, Steve. There is a good chance that hungry alligators and dangerous snakes will be present.”

“You’ve already warned him about that, Parkaar,” Monique reminded me.

“Sorry about that, Steve. Senility is setting in. I’m 52 now, and I wish I knew what I thought I knew.” *Huh? / What?!*

A Latino American family of four strolled up to the Lake Eola plaque. They were really enjoying their morning together.

“Ready to go?” Monique suggested.

“Sure,” I said, getting the hint. *She wants to get somewhere cool. I wouldn’t mind that, either.*

In just six minutes we were entering The Celt (the sister restaurant of The Harp), as The Harp was still closed. There were seven Spurs fans at the bar watching the Stoke City – Tottenham game. *I know that we’re early, but I don’t see any Liverpool fans.*

We sat at a four-top table. Kathy, an Irish waitress (and owner?) came over and took our food and beer orders. We watched the game on the large projection screen over the front door. Then I noticed the score of the Manchester derby in the top-right corner. *Wow, City beat United at Old Trafford.*

“Hey guys, did you see that score?” I asked excitedly.

“No, Agent 33,” Monique replied.

“City beat United 2 to 1,” I said. “I’m sure that a Mourinho meltdown ensued.” I chuckled.

“Would it have been better for Liverpool if the game had ended in a scoreless draw?” Steve asked.

“Maybe so, Steve,” I answered. “But, any time United loses at Old Trafford ... well, that’s hard not to like.”

Halftime came and went. The game turned into a complete rout by Tottenham. Their fans were loving it. Hotspur would go on to win by a score of 4-nil.

Then the British NBC announcers began to pump up the upcoming Reds – Foxes clash for the American audience. They were now showing a video clip of the enlarged main stand at Anfield. *Where the hell are the LFC [Liverpool Football Club] fans in this town? I only see one liver bird shirt in here.*

Kathy then stopped by our table. “Need anything else?”

“No, that’s ok, Kathy,” I replied. “Just one check. By the way, do the Liverpool fans show up right at game time?”

“No, they’re already here on the other side of the bar. [which was actually in between – and common to – both pubs] Just exit to the sidewalk, turn right, and enter through the red door.” *Is the door red for Liverpool? No, don’t ask.*

“Ok, thanks,” I said.

“Will you be ordering more Guinness over there?” she asked.

“Probably so,” I answered.

“Ok, I’ll keep your tab open. See you on the other side.” *We’re going to ‘the other side’. / I guess we look trustworthy.*

We left The Celt and marched north about twenty feet (6 meters). I opened the red door. The other side, The Harp side, was indeed full of LFC fans, save for one young, white, male, unsteady Manchester United fan who was throwing darts. *He must be pissed. Why is he hanging around? Maybe he's hoping that Liverpool loses, too. Yes, that's got to be it. Then he can get a dig in. Well, we shall see.*

We sat at a booth that offered decent sight lines to an overhead flat screen. Kerry, the leader of the Orlando LFC Fans chapter, then walked up and we exchanged greetings with her.

After a rousing *You'll Never Walk Alone*, the match started. It was a Liverpool onslaught from the get-go. Firmino scored the first goal via a nice pass from Milner. Then a Henderson-Sturridge-Mané combination had the Reds up 2-nil, and seemingly in total control.

I turned to the late-50-ish Caucasian guy (John) on my right and said, "It's looking really good."

"Yes, so far, so good," John said in an unmistakable New York City accent. "But, Lucas makes me nervous. He's playing out of position."

A few minutes later his words would prove to be prophetic. Lucas, typically a midfielder, was playing centre-back due to backline injuries. When he was pressured in deep, he made a big mistake by casually passing the ball to where Mignolet was no longer residing. The result: Vardy had an empty-net slam dunk. *Oh, fuck! / Goddamit, Lucas!*

I grimaced. John shook his head. Monique frowned. *Damn!*

“Well, John, you predicted it,” I said. “Could you tell me what stocks to buy, or maybe the next winning lottery number?”

He grinned for a half-second, but his rage quickly returned to his face. “I don’t know why Klopp kept him. It baffles me. He got old fast, and is now clunky. Plus, why is he playing him back there? That’s foreign territory to him. I know we have injuries. But, playing him as the central stopper?”

“Well, you know that Skrtel is gone.”

“Yes, and that’s fine by me.”

“He had heart and a furious passion, though.”

“Too much reckless passion. Too many yellow cards that became red cards. He was a loose cannon on deck. A liability late in games.”

The match reached halftime with the score still at 2-1 for LFC. Our discussion continued as they replayed the goals.

“Well, John, on a positive note, Firmino scored a nice one.”

“Yeah, that’s true. He certainly was due. But, why is his last name not spelled F-I-R-M-I-N-H-O, like Coutinho? He’s Brazilian, too, ya know.”

“You know, John, I wondered that, too, when they signed him.”

The conversation died. John wandered outside to have a smoke. I sat back down with Monique and Steve.

“This is an exciting scene,” Steve said. “You guys are really into this Liverpool team.”

“When you get settled, bro, you should join the nearest LFC chapter in Texas,” Monique suggested.

“I’ll do that,” Steve replied.

“Yey!” Monique exclaimed. “My bro is the newest Liverpool fan.”

“Great, Steve,” I replied. “The Reds nation has one more. You’ll never walk – or be – alone.”

Then the second half commenced. Any fears of the Foxes making a comeback were extinguished when Adam Lallana scored. A late, extra-insurance goal was tacked on by Firmino, after getting an assist from a most unselfish Mané.

As the triple-whistle sounded, the bar erupted into cheers. Beer glasses clinked together.

I then stood up and walked over to John. I noticed that he didn’t have a drink in his hand. “John, a teetotaler, are you? You’re a better man than me.”

“Teetotaler? No, not me.” John then moved aside and pointed to the table that was behind him. There were six empty beer steins.

“Oh, I see. You slugged them down earlier.”

“I just don’t like standing with anything in my hand.”

“I hear ya. Well, a nice win, huh?”

“We’ll take it,” John said with a burp.

“Hey, I wonder when we play [Manchester] United.”

“I think we play the evil empire in mid-October [scheduled for October 17] at Anfield.”

“Evil empire? Now, that’s funny, John.”

“I’m dead serious.”