

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



The Balcony by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | DEC 2014 (rev. OCT 2015)



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We, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33), checked into the Golden Sands Motel at Carolina Beach around noon on Thanksgiving Day 2014. We quickly learned that the motel actually consisted of two mid-rise oceanfront buildings.

A bored, oafish, 60-ish, Caucasian innkeeper assigned us to a room on the top floor of the taller north tower.

Soon, we were on the elevator of the nearly vacant hotel building. Monique depressed the 7 button and up we went in the glass enclosure, watching the parking lot grow smaller.

When the elevator doors opened, I was staring at our room: 718. *Jeez, this is right where the elevator dumps out. Hope it doesn't get too loud tonight with holiday drunks.*

I double-checked the numerals on the door and turned to Monique. "Well, this it, hon."

"I'll open the door, honey," Agent 32 offered. "You have all that luggage in your hands."

"Salamat, mahal. ['Thank you, love' in Tagalog] You're a big help. Cute, too."

Monique smiled and quickly swiped the key card, got a green light, and opened the door. It was a nice room with a mini-fridge, microwave, coffee maker and hair dryer. The king-size bed was clean and quite comfortable, as I promptly flopped down on it. I was quite tired from the 210-mile, four-plus-hour trek from Charlotte.

Monique wasn't ready for naptime just yet. "Don't fall asleep, my dearest kano. [kano is Filipino slang for American] You've got to check out this incredible view!"

I quickly got up from the bed and followed Monique through the sliding glass doorway, making sure to step over the door's lower trackway. It was a narrow balcony. The view, though, was ultra-expansive.

"Yeah, you're right, Monique; this is a million-dollar view. From far left to far right, nothing but Océano Atlántico. [Atlantic Ocean in Spanish] It's mega-maritime!" *Why is he talking in Spanish? Does he already have that audio recorder on?*

"Good pick, 33."

"Look, Agent 32, if you squint your eyes just right and stare straight out, you can see Rick's Café Américain in Casablanca."

"Casablanca? The place in that famous movie?"

"Yes, that place: Casablanca, Morocco." *He's just testing me.*

"Parkaar, [my ailing alias] we can't see that far, even if it is a crystal-clear day."

"Just a geography pop quiz, asawa." [wife in Tagalog and Cebuano] You passed."

We both had a laugh. Some seagulls cawed as they flew by. Maybe they thought it was funny, too.

“Hey, my geography isn’t that bad, map freak,” Monique blurted out.

I chuckled. “All kidding aside, we are on about the same latitude as Casablanca.”

“Really?”

“Yep, yep, yep, as Mr. Malloy [a character featured in the *Mysterieau of San Francisco* novella] would say. We are about 34 degrees north of the equator, give or take a few minutes to think about it.” *Give or take a few minutes to think about it? He’s definitely recording.*

We then got quiet and just stared out over the immense expanse of saltwater. A lone cloud cast a dark splotch on the languidly rolling blue-green surface. The sea was generally calm, but a few whitecaps could be seen about a mile out. *What a picture-perfect nautical scene.*

I then grabbed the top, white, plastic-covered, metal balcony railing and gave it a little shake. Thankfully, it was snug. No loose bolts or screws.

“What in the world are you doing, 33?!” Monique exclaimed.

“Just making sure it is secure. You can never trust these railings. People die from balcony falls every year.”

“You’re always Mr. Safety, aren’t you?” *Safe Tea?*

“Well, I’ve just read and seen the horror stories over the years, Agent 32.”

Monique then peered over the top railing, looking straight down, and then promptly stepped back. “Whew!”

“Higher than you thought?”

“Yes, 33, way higher than I thought. And, that pool down there has no water in it.”

“So, no risk of drowning if your dive goes flat.”

“Very funny, Parkaar. But, if we fall from here ... splat!”

“Yeah, we’re dead for sure if we fall from this height. We’re probably 70 feet up.”

“Yikes, that’s over 20 meters!”

“I don’t think I could stay in a room like this with a toddler.”

“Oh, yeah, they could climb up on a chair or table, and then get up to the top railing, and then ...”

“Yep, up and over – and gone. Finito bambino. [‘Finished baby’ in Italian] Tragically, it has happened.”

“Is this railing at the proper height, mahal? It seems too low.”

“Yeah, the top rail appears to be 42 inches high. That’s all it has to be by building code.”

“If this were my hotel, I think I would have taller balcony railings, 33.”

“Yeah, I agree, Inspector 32. I think I would make them 54 inches tall. Less chance of a fatal mishap.”

“Or, why not just run the vertical bars all the way from the floor to the ceiling?” *That’s a grand idea.*

“Uh, maybe the fire code. Maybe cost. Or, maybe it prevents guests from launching large paper airplanes.” *Large paper airplanes? He’s just talking for a future story once again.*

“Large paper airplanes? What are you talking about?”

“You know, Monique, the kind that can soar all the way to Lisbon on a nice spiral toss in an offshore breeze.” *To Portugal? That’s in Europe. Totally bonkers! He’s just testing my geographical knowledge yet again. I’m not falling for it this time.*

“Or, maybe all those vertical bars ruin the view, huh?”

“Well, you can still see through the four-inch-wide gaps in the balusters, 32.”

“Baluster’s ball-busters!”

We both guffawed. Her smile was so genuine and pure. *Wonder how this night will go.*

“Nice spare coinage, Monique.”

“You liked that one, 33?” *Might as well call him by his agent number, as it’s obvious that he has the DAR [Digital Audio Recorder] on.*

“Yes, indeed. Very creative. That’s good stuff, 32.”

“You want some really good stuff, 33?” Monique asked with a sexy grin.

“Sure, but just let me hit the krapper-kapper. [sic] [commode] Hold that pose.”

“Please try to take less than two hours this time, 33.”

I chuckled. “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” I headed to the bathroom.

Monique sat in the desk chair and got her tablet computer connected wirelessly to the internet.

While on the white porcelain throne, I heard our hotel room door open. *What the hell!*

But, before I could speak or move, the door shut. I never heard anyone enter the room.

“Who was that, hon?” I shouted through the bathroom door. “Is everything ok?”

“It was some Latino man with short black hair, asking if our balcony needed repairs. He saw me in my panties!”

I jumped up off the toilet and opened the door. “What the fuck! Did he look like a motel employee?”

“I don’t know, hon.”

I quickly exited the bathroom. Monique looked shocked. I hugged and consoled her. Then I locked the dead bolt and called the front desk.

“Hey, listen, did you send a maintenance worker up to our room?”

“No, I most certainly did not,” the desk clerk said.

“Well, some guy entered our room, and the door was locked. It freaked my wife out. How many people have key cards to room 718?”

“Only you and your wife, sir. What did this guy look like?”

“My wife says that he was medium build with short black hair, perhaps Hispanic. Do you have any idea who that would be?”

“No, I don’t, sir. Wait a minute; I’ll check with our maintenance supervisor and call you back.”

“Ok, thanks.”

“So very sorry about that, sir.”

I hung up the desk phone and turned to my wife. “The hotel manager is going to check around and find out who that was. Probably just a misdirected maintenance worker, hon.” *I sure hope so.*

“Is it safe to stay here?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

The man at the front desk never called back.

That night I had a terrifying dream of a Mexican construction worker falling from our balcony. It happened as the crew was nearing completion of the building. Apparently the worker tripped over something (the sliding door's trackway?), hit a sawhorse on the balcony, and flipped over the railing, which he frantically grabbed to save himself. The last scene of the dream was of him falling down, looking up at me, with a piece of railing in his hand.

I jerked my arms, bumping Monique. She woke up, too.

"Hon, did you have a nightmare?" she sleepily asked.

"Yeah, I guess so."

We soon drifted back asleep. The remainder of the night was dreamless for me. As for Monique, she was out like a lamb.
Or lamp?

Upon checking out, the hotel desk clerk, a white, middle-age lady today, said that she heard that someone died in a Carolina Beach hotel's construction, but wasn't sure if it was our building.

"Well, never trust a balcony railing," I said as we began to walk away.

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