

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



**Bridge Day** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | AUG 2018

## **Bridge Day**

by Mike Bozart

© 2018 Mike Bozart

Kye was a 29-year-old, male, childless, unmarried-and-still-very-much-single Laotian American. Mony was a 28-year-old, female, childless, unmarried-and-still-very-much-single Cambodian American. They both lived and worked in Charlotte. A 30-year-old Filipina named Lucinda, who was an acquaintance of both, was the matchmaker. After Kye and Mony had a few weekend coffees and a lunch together in the early fall of 2006, they decided to have their first all-day date at the New River Gorge festival known as Bridge Day in southern West Virginia.

On a clear-as-a-sleep-rubbed-off-eye-can-see, refreshingly-brisk-after-a-long-hot-humid-summer, blue-skied Saturday morning, the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, Kye picked up Mony from her Northlake-area apartment in his black 2002 Toyota Camry. It was 7:49 on the digital dashboard clock when he inserted the Natural Calamity CD (compact disc) after entering the rightmost lane of northbound Interstate 77.

“Well, Mony, we’ve got two hundred nineteen miles [352 km] to go,” Kye informed. *Ughhh!*

“How long will that take?” Mony asked, fearing a four-plus-hour answer.

“Three hours and thirty-eight minutes if we don’t stop. Ninety-two percent of the trek is on I-77. Fast freeway miles in light traffic.” *Hopefully no wrecks. / 92%?*

“And, what again is the main draw?” she enquired as they passed the Queen City’s northern city limit.

“BASE – building, antenna, span, earth (cliff) – jumping. There will be over eight hundred jumps from the 876-foot-high [267 meters] bridge. That’s five feet [1.5 meters] taller than the Bank of America [Corporate Center] tower.” *What a Mr. Research!*

“With parachutes?” *Is she serious?*

“Absolutely, Mony. There’s no air cushion below – just the shallow, rocky New River.” *How new is it?*

“Will there be bungee jumping?”

“No, that was banned after 1993. Too many injuries.”

“Darn! I wanted to try it.” *Is she serious?*

By the time they entered Iredell County, Mony had nodded off. *She must have stayed up late last night. Doing what?*

Kye looked at Lake Norman on his left. *Kind of looks like the Nam Ngum Reservoir. That medium-shade-of-green water color. And the reddish earth on the shoreline.*

After passing Statesville and crossing over Interstate 40, Mony suddenly awoke. “Kye, will we be the only Asians up there?” *I really don’t care if we are. / Hope not.*

“Are you afraid that we’ll be thrown off the bridge by some rednecks?” *What made him say that? Maybe he researched the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot. I bet he did.*

“No, nothing like that, silly. Just wondering, that’s all.”

“I’m sure that the festival will be replete with camera-clutching Japanese and Chinese tourists,” Kye assured.

“You’re not going to take any pictures?” *Huh? / Is he afraid of having me appear in a photo that an ex might see? Or, some other female – some other prospective girlfriend?*

“I certainly will, Mony. Plenty of pics. Many of you, too.” *Too?*

“Why do you want to go to this so bad?” Mony asked as she looked over at Kye’s thin, intent, looking-straight-ahead face. *Could I marry this man someday? Mom and dad would probably be ok with him. He’s got a good IT [internet technology] job. Oh, I’m getting way ahead of things. We haven’t even had sex yet. How many girls has he pumped? Does he have plans for tonight? / Didn’t I just tell her? I’ll casually mention the inn to her later. Just say: ‘Mony, you don’t really want to go all the way back to Charlotte this evening, do you? We both have Sunday off.’ Her schedule is open tomorrow; the test question on Thursday revealed that. Continue with: ‘We can get a room with two beds.’ Or one.*

“The BASE jumping,” Kye finally answered. “I want to see them up close. I want to see their equipment, the technique, etc. I want to do a BASE jump someday.” *Is he serious?*

“Oh, ok,” Mony uttered and soon fell back asleep. *How late was she up last night? Four in the morning? Is she a party girl? That crescent-earring tattoo under her left ear – does*

*she have a bohemian-bourgeois aesthetic? Oh, my nonstop nonsense.*

Kye continued a 74 MPH (119 km/h) advance up I-77. When the four-door sedan crossed into Virginia, Mony was still asleep. As her head tilted, his mind meandered. *Was she screwing some guy last night? Is that why she's so sleepy? We're almost an item now, but not quite. Was she bringing a relationship to a close? Or, re-firing it? Does she have me pegged as a convenient no. 2? A readily available, on-demand standby? Must stop tarring her; Mony's nothing like my ex.*

As the Toyota climbed up the eastern flank of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Kye glanced to his right at the piedmont of North Carolina way below. *Would hate to go sailing off this mountain. Certain death. How many wrecks have occurred on this incline during snowstorms? How many fatalities?*

As they crossed the New River on I-77 near Shot Tower State Park, he spotted the old US 52 bridge below on the right. *This bridge is so much higher than that one. I guess they wanted to make sure that I-77 never got flooded.*

Kye looped onto Interstate 81 South (a concurrency) and headed towards Wytheville. The sign triggered some intense neural activity. *Wytheville ... someone born there acquired fame. Who was it? American political history ... a widow who married a widowed president. Which president was it? Darn, c'mon memory. I just read that Wikipedia article yesterday.*

Mony re-awoke and sighed. "Almost to the birthplace of Woodrow Wilson's second wife, Edith, I see." *How uncanny. Almost like she was reading my thoughts.*

"Hungry?" Kye asked. "Want to stop for a bite?"

"No, I can make it," Mony replied. "I've got some coffee in my thermos bottle. Want some?"

"Sure. That should carry me, too."

Mony then poured some black coffee into a paper cup and carefully handed it to Kye. "No cream, but sweet and strong," she informed. *Cream. / Wonder if he brought a condom.*

"Ah, just the way I like it. Thanks." Kye smiled at her. *We shall see about that.*

“You’re most welcome, sexy driver.” *She wants it tonight.*

“Why, thank you, sexy navigator.” *He wants it tonight.*

They passed through two tunnels and then were in West Virginia. It was a resplendent autumn day. *This is going purr-fect. / Wonder how he’ll act later.*

Forty minutes further, just past Beckley, Kye was taking Exit 48 for US 19. They soon were at a toll booth. Kye tossed some silver coins into the funnel. He got the green light to proceed. Their journey to Bridge Day continued, but now with considerably more traffic. *Wonder how crowded it will be on the bridge. / Where have they closed this highway? Guess I’ll soon find out. The colors of the fall leaves sure are intense; the yellows look backlit.*

When they arrived at the town of Oak Hill, Kye spoke up again. “Almost there. Think you can make it food-wise?”

“I’m holding out for a funnel cake and a hot dog,” Mony stated. *She sure is Americanized.*

“And a caramel apple?” Kye added with a slight laugh.

“Sure, why not? Let’s just eat American junk food today.”

Just before North Court Street in Fayetteville, Kye pulled off on the shoulder and parked behind an old, red, rusty Chevy pickup truck that had pulled off just before he did. The string of shoulder-parked vehicles was now 1.3 miles (2.1 km) long and growing. *Wonder what the attendance will be. / How far away is this bridge? Hope it’s close, as in under 1,000 feet. [305 meters]*

“Well, it’s the end of the line in this vehicle, Mony.”

“Do we have to walk a long way, Kye?”

“No, we’ll catch a ride on a free shuttle. I researched it last night.” *Of course.*

Soon they were on a short bus. It was crowded. The mood was anticipatorily jovial. *There are some Asians right there. They look Vietnamese. / So far, so good.*

Seven minutes later, after several stops to pick up more festivalgoers, the shuttle let everyone off at its turnaround point, just ten yards (nine meters) from the closed-to-all-vehicular-traffic bridge.

Kye and Mony got their morning hunger satiated at a vendor's cart who had everything they desired. They then began to snake their way through the throngs of spectators to the center of the four-lane bridge's span. They saw a magenta parachute descending over the olive-colored water, some 600 feet (183 meters) below the steel-beam-atop-concrete-barrier railing. BASE jumping had already commenced from the completed-in-1977, single-steel-arch bridge. It was now 11:44 AM.

An older, white, somewhat paunchy, veteran BASE jumper, one Brian Lee Schubert of Alta Loma (now Rancho Cucamonga), California (the first to jump from El Capitan in Yosemite in 1966), was announced. He smiled to applause on the platform, backed up a half-step, sprung forward, and took the supreme leap of faith. *Wow! So, that's it – just like the videos: You just jump ... and swing from whim to whim. Wonder where and when I should do my first jump. Sure don't want a massive audience like this my first time. / I would never, ever do that! No freaking way! Is Kye really a daredevil type?! But, he's so meek and mild-mannered.*

Mr. Schubert soon reached a freefall speed of 72 MPH (116 km/h) as he closed in on the lazy, indifferent-to-human-folly, very-tranquil-today, ancient (astoundingly misnamed) river. *When is he going to pull the ripcord? / Gosh, this is crazy. Kye really wants to do this? Why? Maybe for the adrenaline rush. Yeah, that's probably it.*

Then a small, purple and blue, only-partially-open parachute was seen six seconds after the jump. However, it didn't fully open. There was a big splash three seconds later. *Woah! He hit the water really hard. Wonder if he is ok. / Oh my God! That didn't look good. Not at all.*

Oohs and aahs emerged from the crowd, followed by groans. The jumping was halted. People started murmuring. Then, thirteen minutes later, Kye and Mony heard a ball-capped, white guy behind them say that Brian had died from impact. *We just witnessed a death in real time. / I bet that will change Kye's mind. Poor old man.*

"Kye, I'm going to take a pee," Mony whispered in his right ear. "I saw some port-a-johns near the shuttle drop-off."

"Ok, I'll just stay here and wait for you," Kye replied, still stunned. *That really happened – that guy really died.*

“Should be back in ten minutes max.”

“Ok, be careful.”

As Mony started to weave her way through the shocked-yet-chattering mass of people, she looked off to her left and saw her Thai ex-boyfriend Sud. Eye contact was briefly made. She kept walking, but now looking down. *Why in the world is he here? How did he know that I would be here? Did he come up here alone? Or, is he with someone? Is it just a coincidence? No, I don't think so. I never heard him mention BASE jumping or Bridge Day. He followed us up here. I just know that he did. But, how? Was he waiting and watching in his car in my apartment complex's parking lot? Sincerely doubt that.*

The line was a dozen-deep for the blue, fiberglass-walled, already-quite-smelly, transportable toilet. Mony looked around as she waited in line. She didn't see Sud. *Good. I hope I don't see him again today. Has he walked over to Kye? Please, not that. Wait, does he even know about Kye? He certainly does if he followed us. Wonder if he put a [tracking] bug in my handbag. Must remember to go through it later.*

Kye looked over the railing which had ‘I love you, Mony, Mony, Mony’ graffiti scratched onto it, noting the vacant railroad tracks on both sides of the river. With his cell phone camera's zoom feature, he was able to discern several ambulances with flashing lights and a slew of paramedics near the right-side bank. Then he heard a Caucasian guy behind him say: “The pilot chute didn't deploy properly.” Another dude quickly added: “He waited way too long, maybe because he was disoriented.” *Alive and seemingly fine one moment, and dead as a doornail ten seconds later.*

While waiting in line, Mony decided to text Kye.

Still waiting for the piss-pot. Such a long line. I'm sorry, Kye, but that jumper's death has tainted this event for me. Would you like to just chill out in a nearby hotel room?

Just after she hit Send, Mony thought: *Was that way too forward? Will he think that I'm easy to get? Easy to screw? Well, I know he wants to, too. Gosh, we're adults. No need to play adolescent games.*

Kye's phone beeped seven seconds later. *Is she ok?* He clicked on the message tab. *'Just chill out'?* *Ha! She wants the sausage. Glad I'm perfectly prepared for this scenario.*

Three minutes later, Kye's right index finger was pecking out a reply. *Must make it seem like I didn't have this lodging reservation beforehand.*

Good call, Mony. Just reserved a room in Fayetteville at a historic bed and breakfast – The Morris Harvey House. This inn was fully booked, but someone cancelled. Our room is called 'the library room'. Care to read a book? Ha-ha

Mony returned fire two minutes later.

I'm second in line now. What a stench! You guys have it so easy with regard to urination – just stand and spray – or go off in the woods. Well, maybe we can write our own book.

The door opened and closed. Mony was next. *Hope he's enjoying the flirting. Hope he can hit all my pleasure spots.*

Ninety-three seconds later, Kye saw her text. He decided to go bold. *Never up, never in. Where did I first hear that saying? Was it while watching golf with dad? Get in the hole!*

My firm pen is ready to write a felt-tipped love story on your erotic body.

Finally the flimsy door opened. A morbidly obese, scruffy, white, middle-aged, bleach-blonde woman waddled out. Mony entered the malodorous port-a-potty and relieved herself. *Whew! Just barely made it in time. Ew! It reeks like a ruptured septic tank in this porta-crapper! [sic] Need to hurry up and get the hell out of here before I vomit.*

Five minutes passed. And then five more. Kye started to get concerned. *Is she ok? Maybe she didn't care for that last text. Maybe in bad taste. Time to repair the damage.*

I apologize for that text, Mony. I got carried away. We can just chill out as you initially stated. The room has two beds. I'll be a good boy.

Finally, four agonizing minutes later, he got a reply as the BASE jumping restarted. *I guess the show must go on.*

Oh, you're fine, silly. Kye, am I on the reservation? If not, could you add me? Our first night together. I'm going to save the receipt forever.

Kye answered her question two minutes later.

You are now, darling.

An Asian American jumper then launched himself. Kye watched his tumbling, end-over-end descent. *Is he going to be the next fatality? Within an hour of Brian? The second since 1987? Hope not.*

But then the yellow-suited jumper pulled out of the twirling and his black-and-white parachute fully bloomed. *That was right on cue. He must have a lot of jumps under his belt.*

The crowd clapped sporadically. The applause for the jumpers now seemed subdued in the wake of the tragedy 48 minutes prior. A yellow jacket circled Kye's lips. *Damn! How long has it been? Where is she amongst this motley lot? Another food-stamp libertarian and a six-figure socialist.*

Kye shot her another playful salvo.

Time's up! The big bad wolf is coming for you, raven locks. Seriously, I'm walking towards Toiletland [sic] now.

After hanging out by the scores of portable commodes for ten minutes, Kye texted Mony again.

Ok, dear, I'm here in Crapperville, [sic] USA, standing closest to unit 14. Where are you, sweetheart? BTW, you're right – the odor is beyond fetid.

Fifteen minutes passed without a text from Mony. Kye started to freak out. He called her. There was no answer. He then walked the entire length of the 3,030-foot-long (924 meters) concrete bridge. Twice. *Where is she? Something bad has happened. I can feel it. But, what? Who? Why? Should I tell the police? File an official missing-person report? No, not yet. I'll just go to the hotel room and think about what to do next.*

Kye caught the mini-bus back to his car. He then made the short drive to the bed and breakfast on Maple Avenue at Harvey Street. The cheerful, mid-30-something, dark-eyed brunette clerk disclosed: "Mony has already checked in, sir." *WTF?!*

On the covers-missing, cerise-stained-wrinkled-white-sheet, queen-size bed was Mony's lifeless, bloody, naked body.