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magazine

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“Midseason”

I had a plan to write about something else, something more “literary” and as such more pertinent to you folks who are the readers. Maybe I could put this off for a month or two. But baseball isn’t a month-or-two thing. It’s a now thing. The game is tonight. Or this afternoon. He’s twenty-four, and will retire soon, in the grand scheme of things. Right this moment, he’s flirting with .400, or on a pace to hit 45 dingers. That will change next week. Or perhaps not. (I am hopeful that Mr. Arraez of Miami’s Marlins continues to be as hot at the plate as he is today.)

So, no, this can’t wait. It’ll be around the All-Star game when you open these pages. The middle of the season. For some teams - mine, maybe – it’s already over, time to trade the pieces on the board and see what comes of it next year. I have no long-term emotional tie (yes, it’s a kind of baseball infection) so I won’t become outraged at any changes. I will be, however, discouraged.

I’ll have three more tickets to see the Durham Bulls, in my seat up near the rafters behind the visitors’ dugout. It is hot there, even in the late afternoon of a July Thursday. Shady, but stifling. I pay for a bottle of water, and maybe some peanuts. I like to shell peanuts and drop the shells on the ground, to step on, crunch, even though to my senior-citizen self it is messy, avoidable. But what does one do with the shells, otherwise? Put them in my shirt pocket? No. It is appropriate to let them fall, like a child would. And I check the major league scores between innings. What is Shohei doing? How are the Cards and Rays faring?

It has been an odd season for me – because in some ways I have lost my compass. For twenty years, I have followed Albert Pujols, from his sophomore year at first with St. Louis, through his salad days, past the move to Anaheim and his inexorable, inevitable winding down. Last summer was amazing, at the age of forty-two back with the Cardinals, he played with, what did Costner call it? “Fear and arrogance.” Fear, maybe, because it was all coming to a close. Arrogance because, well, because he was Albert the *Machine*. And now he’s home, doing something else. Maybe fixing a light in his kitchen. Running on a treadmill at the gym. Grilling in the back yard. I like to think that he’s doing these everyday tasks, sipping a cup of coffee. But this summer, I look at all of the teams, watch a lot of games, and I’m following anyone or anywhere. This is odd, and I miss looking at the scores for a particular name and contribution.

When I was twelve, I collected baseball cards. A pack of Topps cost fifteen cents. I made a quarter a week allowance, emptying the trash. (I was an awful employee of my mom – who had to constantly remind me not to pour the trash from little cans into bigger cans, but to just carry the little cans out to the bins, one by one. So inefficient, but it had to be done that

way because my dad poured his ashtrays into the little cans and if I did the can-transfer, I ended up with ashes all over the carpets. I did it anyway, of course, and sneakered the ashes in so she couldn't see my mess.) Every two weeks I could go with my half-dollar to the luncheonette and buy three "wax-packs" of cards and a nickel-size pack of Bazooka bubble-gum. If I rationed myself, and didn't share with my friends, that would last about a week of hard chewing. I did not put the bubble gum on the bed-post overnight, but I did set it on a square of toilet paper, and then attempted to peel off the bits of paper as best as I could in the morning after breakfast. If I neglected this ritual, my mom always threw it out when she found it later, in what I am certain was legitimate disgust.

I loved looking at the cards, pictures on the front, statistics on the back. It is a funny thing, probably rare now, discovering baseball and baseball cards at around the same time. If you are of a certain age, and a little bit lucky, the cards you get are the players you attach to, a bit like baby ducks bonding with whatever they see first, right after they hatch. Or, maybe that's a...suburban legend, I don't know. Anyhow, my guys were Jim Wynn (the Toy Cannon) and Vida Blue, Cleon Jones and Donn Clendenon and I don't expect any of those names to mean anything to you. And it was a time when parents sometimes got both the morning and the afternoon daily paper, I learned to follow the scores of your team and my teams were the teams of my baseball card heroes. Nowhere at all local to New Jersey, but rather spread throughout the land – Houston and Oakland and Pittsburgh and St. Louis. I thought about those places and the other fans of those teams and our bond with the players. Our common desire for their success, player and team. And then, if someone was traded, saying farewell to that city to follow them to the next landing place – Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia. Their skill, longevity, the color of their skin, didn't matter to me. Only that I had their card.

It's good, I think, to have connections – however tenuous as the whims of a team's general manager – with other places. To feel like the Dominican Republic and Venezuela and Toronto, Canada and Mizusawa, Iwate, Japan are places where real people are born and live and to have those people be important to you.

And it's OK if you don't know what I'm talking about from a baseball perspective. Translate the idea into whatever medium makes sense in your life: novelists and poets and guitar players and movie actors, what have you. Love them in their words on the page, in their concert performance, in the scene on the screen. That's the best way, I think.

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

missed the boat that day

“A G-String Symphony”

by Dennis Vannatta

I come into the lobby from getting my cheese Danish and Dr. Pepper breakfast at the 7-Eleven, and Bert calls me over to the desk. I've got my room paid up to the end of the month, so I'm not too worried, just a little.

“I've got a message for you,” he says and hands me a little piece of paper.

“For me?”

“Yes.”

“You sure?”

It does have my name—Charles—printed on the outside, but you could put a person's name on the outside of anything, a box of diamonds. Would that make it mine?

The thing is, I don't get messages.

Bert doesn't answer me. He's a man of few words. That's OK. Takes all kinds. Me, I go the other way, talk too much, probably. That's why my last foster mom, Mrs. Craft, gave me the heave-ho. She said I was driving her crazy. I was sorry because she was a nice lady, ran a nice home, and not all of them do, trust me on that one. But I was almost eighteen at the time anyway, so two more months in a halfway house, and I was on my own. That was three years ago. Now the Regency Arms is home; a dump, true, but I have my own room, a thing I've never had before. You have to look for the bright side.

I stand there fiddling with the

folded paper a bit, Bert watching me with that I can't sit down because of my hemorrhoids look. It's none of his damn business what the note says, is it?

I leave him standing there, cross the lobby, bypass the elevator, which I never take because of the smell, and unfold the note as I start up the stairs.

I read it and then back down the stairs to the lobby where the light's a little better. I have to make sure I've read it right. It says

I'll see you soon,

Charles

I try to keep myself from breaking into a run as I head back to Bert. Act like you've been there. Which I haven't.

“Bert, who left me this message?”

My hemorrhoids are killing me: “How the hell should I know?”

“You took it, didn't you?”

“Do I look like I took it? D.J. did.”

I have to admit that's a possibility. D.J. works the night shift. He was still there when I left to get my breakfast at the 7-Eleven around 7:45, so if somebody left a message for me, they would have done it before Bert came on at 8:00. Which means I just missed them!

“What do you think the chances are of D.J. remembering who it was when he comes back on at midnight?” I ask, and something happens to Bert's face, a variety of

smile, maybe, as unlikely as that seems.

*

I eat my breakfast at the card table in my room. I found it on the street propped up against a garbage can. It's perfectly good. Perfectly. And somebody just threw it out. It makes you wonder.

Breakfast is the only meal I eat in my room except lunch sometimes. I like a hot meal for dinner especially, and you're not supposed to use a hotplate in your room although when you walk down the hall you can hear things frying and popcorn popping, so what does that tell you?

I have a lot of options for dinner. You can get hotdogs at the 7-Eleven, fried chicken at the Gas-Up, and pizza at the Exxon. I never eat the same thing for dinner two days in a row because I believe in a varied diet. When I lived with the Pindalls age ten to eleven, we had pinto beans and baloney for dinner every night. They were good beans and baloney, I'm not saying that, but come on.

I eat my breakfast with the message lying open so I can read it.

I'll see you soon,

Charles

Somebody is coming to see me, and soon, and it was important enough to them that they left me a message.

Let's face it, it's a real mystery. I make friends easily, what with my gift of gab, not to brag, so I have a lot of friends here at the Regency Arms. But it'd be unlikely to be one of them, wouldn't it? I mean, all they'd have to do is come knock on my door. Why leave a message?

That means it'd be from somebody outside the Regency Arms. The mystery deepens.

*

I knock on my friend Alton's door. I have to show somebody this message. He comes to the door wrapped in his Spiderman beach towel, which means he's just finished taking a shower.

The Regency Arms is a dump, but we all do have little bathrooms, a toilet, sink, and a tiny shower, a plastic thing with two sides. The other two sides are supposed to be the shower curtain, which hangs from a curved metal rod. Albert has the curtain but not the rod, which is inconvenient, but he's not the type to complain, so he'll shower with the water just barely coming out so it won't splash all over. Then he dries off with Spidey.

I should apologize for interrupting his toilette—which I learned from the Prof is what you call cleaning up in the morning—but I'm too excited about my message.

"Look at this, my friend," is what I say.

He squints at the note like he's visually impaired, a possibility. Yes, the Regency Arms is a dump, but it could be a lot worse, believe me. Like, there are no one-nighters or one-hourers because you have to pay by the month. Most of us live off of Social Security disability for one thing or another, including me although I'm healthy as a stallion. My friend Edward, the smartest person I've ever known except for the Prof, taught me how to fake an inability to hold a job due to nerve problems and stuff. It took almost

a year to pull it off because the government can get real chicken shit about stuff like that, but eventually the lucky day arrived. I was supposed to pay Edward fifty dollars a month for his help, but by then he'd sort of given up on everything and said keep it. He was a very smart guy but very very sad. He went away. People go away around here all the time. I plan on staying as long as I can because when you have your own room, you don't fool around with something like that.

Anyway, Alton. He looks at the note a minute, turns it over and looks at the front, turns it back, then hands it back to me.

"Who's Charles?"

"What do you mean, 'Who's Charles'? *I'm* Charles."

I'd think Albert was having a senior moment except that he's not much older than I am. Me, I remember everything in my life, everything, each experience a thing I can think back on, replay, a note in a grand symphony like Beethoven, Sibelius, Brahms, all those greats that Mr. and Mrs. Marcks made us kids sit in a row on folding chairs and listen to every night, and if we made a peep, no dinner for you, Bub. The other kids hated it but not me because they were symphonies within *my* symphony. I mean, it's my life, right? And if you don't love your own life, what's the point?

"Not you, *this* Charles," Alton says, stabbing his finger at the note.

I read it one more time, just to make sure.

"Yeah. Charles. That's me."

"No no. Look. 'I'll see you

soon.' That's on one line. That's what you call a salutation. You know, like, 'Love, comma, Mary.' Or 'Yours truly, comma, John Doe.' Here it's 'I'll see you soon, comma, Charles.'"

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

Alton sort of recoils, and right away I regret saying it. He's one of my oldest, dearest friends. I've known him the better part of a year. Do I want to risk losing an old friend over this new person who's anxious to see me? You know what they say about silver friends and gold ones. (On the other hand, who's to say it's not the new one that's gold? Still, silver, gold, it's all treasure.)

I'd put my hand on Alton's shoulder and give it a little affectionate squeeze except he's not big on human contact.

Instead, I say, "Alton, I'm sorry. I guess I'm just worked up over this new thing, you know. This mystery. Overwrought, as Mrs. Martin might say."

The Martins were my foster parents around age thirteen. Assholes, just being frank here, but big vocabularies, both of them.

Alton says he understands completely, and can sympathize.

That's what friends do. Fall out and make up, fall out and make up. With other people, it's mostly fall out.

*

I'm so busy rereading my message that I exit the stairwell on the third floor instead of the second, like I'd intended.

I don't realize my mistake until, walking down the hall toward

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what I think is Lonnie's room, I step onto the sticky carpeting and my sneakers make that sucking noise when they pull off of it.

Everybody at the Regency Arms is responsible for cleaning their own rooms, but the super, Mr. Floyd, takes care of the carpeting in the hallways. It's kind of his specialty because I don't know what else he does. I mean, he's never fixed the shower bar in Alton's room, has he? And I asked him to fix the sink in my room right after I moved in because it wouldn't shut off all the way, and he just gave me a look he borrowed from Bert the desk clerk. So I just let it run.

"You lucky bastard. You've got a water feature," Hankins told me, joking, of course, but the joke's on him because I like it. It's kind of soothing.

No one can complain about the job Mr. Floyd does on the carpeting, though, because he vacuums once a week. You can't ask for more than that, hey?

I should say nobody can complain except Trini, who lives in 36. The sticky patch is right in front of his door. Mr. Floyd's vacuuming doesn't seem to affect it too much. Did Trini spill something on it? I don't know, and I'm not about to ask him.

Trini and I don't get along, and it's my fault. Not long after I moved into Regency Arms I was exploring my new home and came to a stop right on the sticky patch. I was so taken with the sound my sneakers made on it that I hadn't even noticed that the door was half open until I heard this voice, "You like the sound of that one?"

'Desperado,' minus the g-string."

I swear to God I thought the guy sitting inside on a straight-backed chair, a guitar in his hands, was talking about the sticky patch. But no, it was the tune he was playing. I came close to recognizing it.

He invited me inside, began playing another song.

"How about this one. 'Voodoo Chile.' Style of Stevie Ray Vaughan, minus the g-string."

Strange, strange sound, but then I'm not familiar with 'Voodoo Chile' or this Stevie Ray. Trini's a lot older than I am, so it's no doubt something from one of the earlier generations.

He played a few more songs before that thing he kept saying, "minus the g-string," sank in.

"Wait. What's this g-string business?" I asked him, and he said, "The g-string. I broke the g-string on my guitar a long time ago and never replaced it. I started fooling around, playing songs without it, and now I kind of like the effect."

I about lost control of my bladder laughing.

"G-string! Broke your g-string!"

"What the hell's so funny?"

"Don't you know what a g-string is?"

"Of course I do. The string that goes right here. I told you. I broke it."

I laughed some more, then told him what a g-string was, a thing that women wear under their clothes. Thong is another name for it. I told him I had a girlfriend once who wore one, and he called me a goddamn liar, which is true because I've never had a girlfriend

but really really want to someday, and then he stood up and laid his guitar down real careful like it was made of glass. And then he turned and came for me, and I got the hell out of there because you can't take your chances with a guy with no sense of humor, a thing I've learned the hard way.

Anyway, I haven't been back to Trini's room until today, and here I am right in front of his door prancing up and down just to hear my sneakers suck up off the carpet. *squeesh squeesh squeesh* and Trini comes to the door like I'd just rung the bell.

"The fuck you want?"

I'm too dumb to run, instead hand him the note like he's enough of a human being to appreciate it.

"Look at this message somebody left me. What do you think of that?"

He takes it but doesn't chew it up and spit it back in my face like you'd expect, reads it. Frowns. Shakes his head slowly. Hands the note back to me.

"These bitches have their way of torturing you, don't they?" he says bitterly. "They'll do it every time."

"What are you talking about?"

"You mean you don't get it?"

He points to the note. "'Soon.' What does that mean? 'Soon.'"

"Well, I guess it means, you know, *soon*."

"OK, but what does 'soon' mean? Like, before nine o'clock this morning? By noon? Maybe 'soon' means tomorrow. Or next week. Or maybe she's up on the space station right now and she'll see you soon as she gets back,

about a year from next fall. Maybe 'soon' really means never, and here you're waiting with your heart in one hand and your pud in the other and—"

He slumps against the door frame, runs his fingers through his hair.

"They'll do it every time, Charles, the bitches will do it to you every time."

I pat him on the shoulder and tell him it's going to be OK, and maybe we can split a pizza at the Exxon some day soon and have a real heart to heart. Then I *squeesh* my way off the sticky carpet. I move off up the hallway trying not to break into a dance because it's not courteous to act so happy when another guy is hurting.

Because I am happy. It was Trini who saw what should have been obvious to me in the first place: it was a girl who sent the message. Think of it: a *girl*.

*

I go on down to the second floor, which was where I'd meant to go instead of the third floor. My good friend Lonnie has a room here.

Me, proud: "Lonnie, look at this. From a *girl*."

He takes one look and backs away like he's just stepped into quicksand and hopes there's still time to save himself.

"Jesus, Charles. Who'd you piss off?"

I read the message again like I haven't already done it a hundred times. Have I missed something?

"Oh. You're thinking this could be like a threat."

"Of course. What else could it be?"

"Well, I can tell you what everybody else who's seen this agrees on. It's a message from some girl who's going to come see me. Soon. Real soon."

"Girl coming to see you. Funny. You must be watching The Hallmark Channel again."

Lonnie has nothing but contempt for The Hallmark Channel, but he does watch Lifetime. Go figure.

"It happens, Lonnie, it happens."

"Not to people like us," he says, meaning, I guess, people who live at the Regency Arms.

"It happens mostly to people like us, Lonnie. They make movies about it. Some guy down on his luck and this really super girl falls in love with him. You think they'd bother making a movie out of some girl leaving a message for George Clooney?"

"The Hallmark Channel would," he says, then laughs like he's pleased with himself for that knee-slapper, a rare thing, him laughing or being pleased with himself either one.

The fact is, Lonnie is kind of a sad-sack, has trouble seeing the good side of things. Just the opposite of me, in other words. But it takes all kinds, and I can be friends with any of them who want to be friends with me. All it takes to make a friend is the willingness to be one.

Whoa! Listen to that: *All it takes to make a friend is the willingness to be one*. Beautiful, if I do say so myself. They'd pay money to put that one on a Hallmark card. I'd run back to my room and write it down before I forget it, but I'm

anxious to go out and show off my note some more, because my friends aren't limited to the Regency Arms, understand.

"Well, I just wanted to share my good news with you, Lonnie," I say, waving the note at him. "I'd invite you to take a walk down the sunny side of the street with me, but you'd spend the whole time searching the sky for that one dark cloud, you miserable bastard!"

Now why did I have to go and say that? Sometimes I feel anger, I admit it, I'm not Buddha or Jesus H. Christ, never said I was.

"Sorry, Lonnie, sorry," I say, waving, and he manages a smile through his tears, a very sensitive guy, and waves back, so we're all right, friends again, fall out, make up, the way friends do.

Then I go out.

*

Then I turn around and go right back in.

What was I thinking? Be out there out showing off my message when *she* might come here looking for me?

I go up to my room, pull my chair over to the window, that great view, sit down, and wait.

Yeah, I know, Trini was right about the girl part of the message, so he might be right about the "soon" part, too. I might have to wait a long time. So what? I'm young. I've got my whole life ahead of me. It might be even better this way because, when you think about it, isn't it a wonderful thing to have something to wait for? Like I always say, you have to look at the bright side because that other side, wow, that other side . . .

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“Tale of the Yeti”

by K. A. Williams

I hated winter. Food was harder to get, most of the animals were hibernating. I left my cave and began to inspect the traps I had set out. A male human had been caught in one. He was sitting on the snow trying to remove it from his boot. Camping equipment lay on the ground next to him. He watched me approach and quickly pulled something from his coat pocket. It looked like a weapon; I closed the distance and batted it out of his hand. When I picked him up and slung him over my shoulder, he screamed, then hung limply. I carried him back to my cave.

He was still unconscious as I pried open the trap, removed his boot, and checked his foot. It didn't seem to be broken, only swollen. I covered him in furs and left to go get his camping equipment.

*

The man was awake when I returned. He was trying to force the boot over his swollen foot, but stopped when I entered the cave. “W-What are you going to do with me?”

“Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you. I'm sorry about the trap. Only explorers come up the mountain this far, is that what you are?”

“Yes. I came to see the Yeti I'd heard about. I was foolish to come alone. How can you speak my language?”

“I'm an alien. My spaceship crashed on this mountain several years ago. I listened to this planet's broadcasts and with the help of my computer, I was able to learn languages. My ship was too damaged to repair, so I transmitted a distress call. I've been waiting.”

His eyes widened. “I've never heard of a computer and spaceships are science fiction. No one can travel among the stars.”

“Your species is young and barely into your 20th century. Someday everyone will turn their attention to outer space.”

“Why?”

I shrugged and went over to the fire where I filled a bowl for him from a pot near the edge. After I dropped some clean snow inside to cool it, I handed him the bowl and a spoon. “Here. You're probably hungry. It's soup.”

His hands trembled a bit as he took the bowl from me, but he managed to hold the spoon steady enough to eat. “Thank you. Since you can't go into town, how do you get supplies?”

“Some expeditions get tired of climbing and just leave supplies behind so they can go back down with a lighter load. Others aren't lucky enough to get that chance. When it's warmer, I go down into towns and steal a little food from their gardens at night. I can see in the dark better than humans.”

“You must have been very lonely all this time.”

“Yes, very.” I sat down next to him. “I'm a female.”

“Oh. Are you?” He shifted away from me.

I laughed. “This isn't how I really look; I made this outfit from furs with tools I took from my ship. I wanted something that was both warm and ferocious enough to scare predators, so I designed a false head with lots of animal teeth. I see out through holes in the neck.”

I removed my Yeti disguise and he stared at me in my undergarment. “You look human. Why didn't you go into town in the summer without your costume and pretend to have lost your memories? Someone would have taken you into their home.”

“I kept hoping my distress call would be heard and I would be rescued. Maybe my beacon is too weak to transmit that far away.”

“You must realize that nobody is coming for you, I could take you home with me.”

“Why would you want to?” I asked.

“You're here all alone.”

“I can't bear your children though. I don't think we're compatible enough.”

“That's okay, it would just be me and you.”

*

We cuddled together under the warm furs and he stroked my hair. “I can walk again since my ankle has healed. My friends must think I'm dead now, I should leave. I mean, *we* should leave.”

“I’ll have to make an outfit out of furs so I won’t freeze going down the mountain, I can’t wear the Yeti costume. Can you wait?”

“Of course. I’m not going anywhere without you.”

I got up and hunted around until I found the device. Then I showed it to him.

“What’s that?”

“The homing beacon.” He watched while I smashed it to

pieces with a steel trap. “Even if a ship came for me I wouldn’t leave, because of you. Earth is my home now.”

He smiled. “Yes, it is.” ❖

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we’d love to read them. We won’t publish your whole name.

My office is on a long, wide hallway that looks very much like the long, wide hallway that led from the principal’s office down past the drama department to the stairway down to the bandroom. Go figure. There are only a couple of other people in my office – what we used to call a bullpen – and they’re all salespeople. I’m only sales support, and I have very little to do. The company has been laying folks off for years now, and the truth is I don’t think we have any products to sell, anyhow. How the company survives, I don’t know. I go out in the hallway, looking for something – I’m sure it was important at some point, but at the moment it completely escapes me what I want. Three doors down from there is another room, filled with stuff on shelves. Office supplies. Broken equipment. Wire and cables. Guys bent over work, their desks scattered around the room, against the walls.

I don’t know their names. I cannot remember if I ever knew their names. It would not surprise me to know that all I ever called them was Sport or Hey, Fella. Does my laptop need repair? Or a larger hard drive? Probably. I don’t interrupt anyone, though, and make my way further down the hall, to where it is blocked with stacks of old office furniture. This kind of thing is not unusual, as we downsize, the furniture is pulled out of offices and ready to be auctioned off. It is depressing, there is so many chairs and desks that used to have people sitting at them, doing something. Something that doesn’t need being done? Something that no one appreciates anymore? I don’t know.

I turn and walk back in the other direction. Returning to my own office, my desk is missing and my stuff, so to speak, is in boxes on the linoleum floor. Where are my car keys? My briefcase with my lunch in it? I realize that I’ve been given my walking papers, and it’s time to go. Funny, that this doesn’t distress me, much.

Earl - Hoboken

Three by Brooks Lindberg

“Parable of the Leopard”

To cage a leopard requires ninety-nine bars an inch thick.
To cage a human requires one: a cane.
And a poet: a pen.

“The Poem Mistaken For A Landscape”

The poem mistaken for a landscape:
doesn't exist
though many are mistaken for love
which they are
but like any landscape
isn't for us.

"Sieging Eternity"

:

Like cattails
fraying over a swamp
our bodies
loom over those
who've mixed
with the black belching mud.

So,
I hoist my thinning mass
into the blue air
to write this.

Glory! Victory! Glory! Glory!

Poem

by Bruce Baldwin

I know what people think
as they pass me by.
“I bet he eats oranges and spinach
look at his eyes”.
Crude remarks about yogurt,
about beef sticks,
about Christmas pies.

I feel their deeps thoughts
as they pass me by.
“The wise man has a future”
Ha! Metaphysical lies.
Saturated in relief
moving as a rumor
combing the night skies.

I know what ghosts do
as they pass me by.
Slow and determined
they have closed eyes,
solemn and silent these kings and queens
floating on metaphors
of a loved ones dreams.

Contributors:

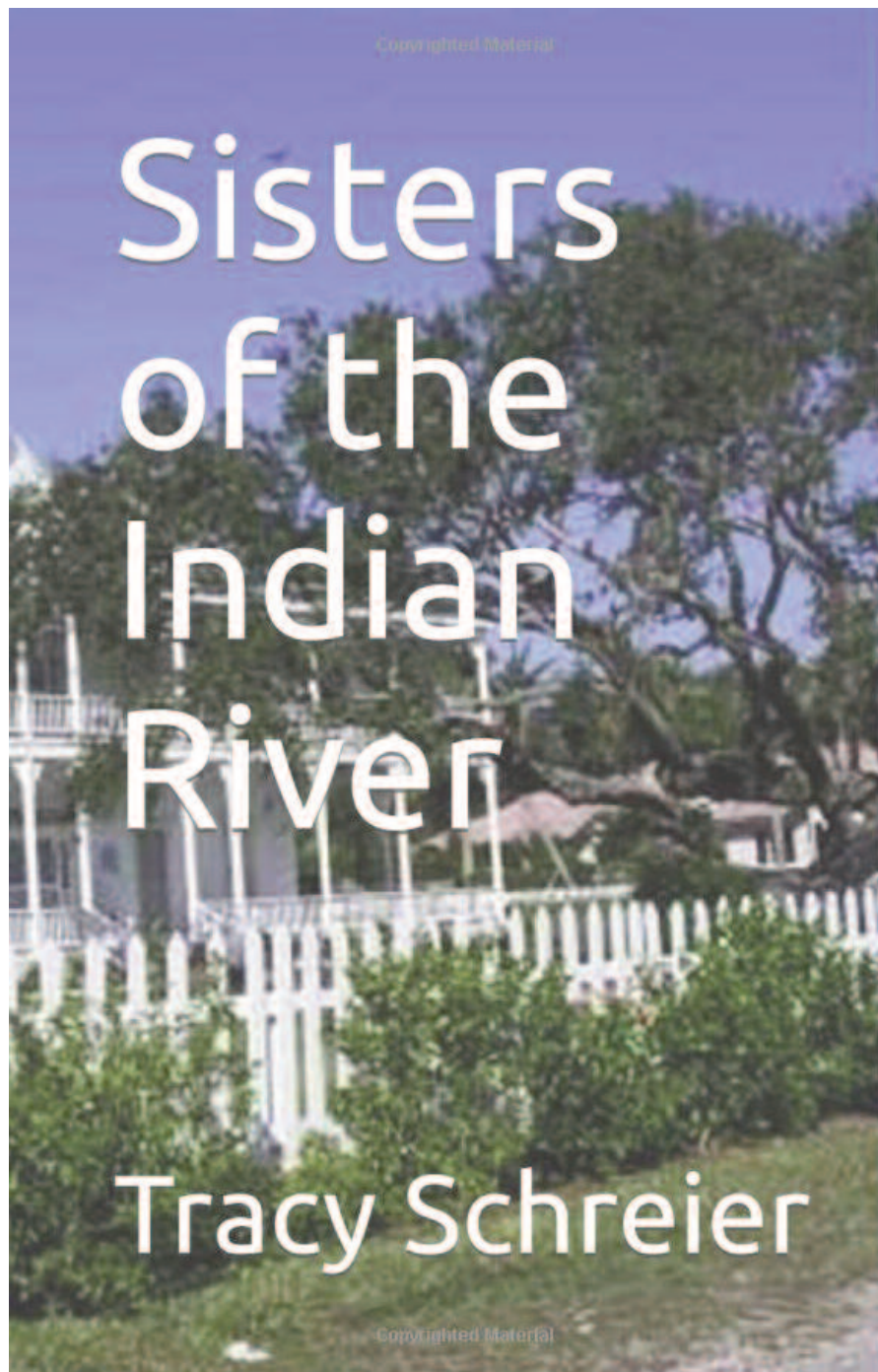
Dennis Vannatta is a Pushcart and Porter Prize winner, with essays and stories published in many magazines and anthologies, including *River Styx*, *Chariton Review*, *Boulevard*, and *Antioch Review*. His sixth collection of stories, *The Only World You Get*, was published by Et Alia Press.

K. A. Williams writes speculative, mystery/crime, romance, general fiction, and poetry. Over 275 of her stories and poems have been published in various magazines including *Corner Bar* and *View From Atlantis*. Her upcoming fiction is scheduled for *Yellow Mama* and *Savage Planets*. She has self-published ebooks of poetry collections, story collections, novellas/novels, and Kindle short reads. Apart from writing, the author enjoys 70s rock music and CYOA games.

Brooks Lindberg hikes and swims between bouts of stalking butterflies. His poetry has appeared before in *The Blotter Magazine*. Others appear in *Blue Pepper*, *Tigershark Magazine*, *Squawk Back*, *Wild Violet*, and elsewhere. You can find links to his work at brookslindberg.com.

Bruce Baldwin is a painter living in Cary, North Carolina. He has been involved with many local art shows and sells original works and takes commissions online. His paintings have reached throughout North Carolina as well as across the United States and as far as England. To see more art, search Instagram for - "Brucebaldwin798", for contact by email, send any inquires to - "atbrucesartstudio@gmail.com"

“Sarah Graham, newly divorced and navigating the world of modern-day dating, converts her Antebellum mansion into an unofficial halfway house for ‘lost women’ and takes on a nursing student, an artist, a writer, and a lesbian fisherman who falls in love with them all. Though each woman is busy with her own pursuits, their lives quickly become irreversibly



intertwined by domestic violence, a homicide, and a tragic death of a beloved friend. As they discuss the issues of love, relationships, and the journey to self-actualization, they come to define and depend upon the vital testimony of the female alliance.”