

Help With the Puzzle
#18 – Genre: Literary Fiction/Fantasy, 989 words
By Lynn Chamberlain

Mary looked at her phone after her dad hung up, transfixed, as if the phone continued to communicate. Throughout her life when she felt overwhelmed, he was her rock. Even as an adult, he continued to help keep her grounded. At one point, she felt the same way about her ex-fiancé, Johnny, and that's probably why she had dreamt about him. Suddenly, she felt a renewed energy and focus in trying to unravel everything that had happened. Somehow, all of this was connected, she just needed to put the puzzle pieces together and figure it out. She stood up from the patio table, grabbed the empty carton of ice cream, and walked into the house.

It was time to put on her detective hat and start analyzing everything which had transpired. In addition, she had to remain safe from contracting COVID-19. The last thing she needed was to get sick and possibly die. If only Sylvia were alive to help. Mary stopped in her tracks. Her eyes opened wide, her jaw dropped, and she audibly gasped. She knew what she had to do.

"It's a crazy idea, honey," Forest told her later that evening as he sashayed across her living room. He spun around and confronted her, "I just don't know what would happen."

"Don't tell me that," Mary argued. "We have to give it a try. You're my best hope in sorting all of this out."

He defiantly lifted his chin and wiped his hands together as if he was divesting himself from the outcome. Forest wagged his finger at her and continued, "Well, I won't be held responsible for what happens." He took her hand. "Close your eyes sweetheart, here we go."

"Wait," Mary said. "What time is it?"

Forest took out a decorative pocket watch and squinted at the hands, "It's 7:30 p.m."

"Perfect," Mary noted. With that, they disappeared in a flash of light.

When Mary opened her eyes she was still in her house, but she could tell it was earlier by the light streaming in the window. Now, she stood by the entryway to the front door. A bucket and a mop rested before her and the floor glistened from just being cleaned.

The doorbell rang, but this time it didn't startle her.

"Just a minute, Sylvia!" Mary called out. Quickly, Mary grabbed a blanket from the sofa, threw it on the freshly scrubbed foyer, and wiped the floor in an attempt to absorb the water

residue. Then, she swiftly pulled back the picture table a good foot or two, cautious she didn't cut herself on the jagged edge. Confident she'd magically changed the outcome, she opened the front door.

"What took you so long?" Sylvia blurted with a broad smile as she rushed inside.

Mary smiled back and grabbed Sylvia's hand. She had tears in her eyes as she lead her friend away from the front door, "Gosh, it's good to see you. Careful, don't slip on the wet floor."

Sylvia stepped over the wet blanket and followed Mary. She turned serious, "How did you know it was me?"

Mary, forgetting her germ phobia, pulled her friend close, and gave her a passionate hug. "Premonition," she continued, "but there's more than that. There's a lot going on and I need your help."

"Mary, I ran over to warn you, there's..." Sylvia stopped dead in her tracks. "Who is he and why is he here?" She looked directly at a smiling Forest who, like a relaxed cat, reclined across the living room couch and raised his paw in salutation.

"Long story," Mary explained. "It's only Forest, you can trust him. But, we can't stay long. Both of us have to return back to our time." Forest winked at Sylvia.

Sylvia seemed flustered, "Our time? What time does that mean?"

"Sit down so we can explain," Forest pointed to the couch. A few minutes later, Sylvia stared at them in disbelief.

"So, I'm dead?" she squealed. "All of this has happened in the last few days? It sounds like years the way you've described it."

"Time travel has a way of doing that," Forest interjected as he casually inspected his nails.

Mary shook her head in agreement, "I know it's crazy, but we have to go back to the present and you should be there. Then, we need to figure out how all of this ties into the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Before you go," Sylvia continued, "you know, I went to the Golden Sassy without you and attended the lecture by Michael Rothschild. Bottom line, Jing Liu, and Elly are working with him. None of them can be trusted."

"Yes, I found the brochure in your purse," Mary said, "I still don't know why you went

without telling me.”

“Mother told me to go and not tell you,” Sylvia apologized. “She warned me about him, but said I needed to hear the lecture about the Golden Sassafras.”

Mary had a quizzical look. “About your mother – she’s a nature spirit?”

Sylvia gave a huge sigh of relief. “I am so glad you know! I’ve kept that secret for years. I’ve been wanting to tell you, but Henry and Aronia told me not to say anything.”

Mary’s mouth gaped, “You know them?”

“Yes. The Old Man, Twix, the farm, all of it. Ronnie too,” Sylvia sheepishly confided.

Just then, Forest stood up and feigned a yawn, “Ladies, I hate to break up your little moment, but, Mary, we need to leave.” He took Mary’s hand.

Sylvia looked around, “ I’m staying here where it’s safer, in case I was followed.”

Mary nodded in agreement, then she had a thought.

“Wait!” she began, just as she and Forest began to disappear, “Call Henry and Aronia, tell them...” With a flash, they were gone.

Exhausted, Sylvia leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes. Half asleep, she was startled by the unexpected “Ring, Ring” of the doorbell.

Lynn Wynen-Chamberlain is a retired teacher from St. Louis, Missouri, and now calls Texas her home away from home. She received her Business degree from University of Maryland and worked in the Aerospace industry for fourteen years before she received her Masters Degree in Education. While she was a teacher she pursued her love of writing and received her MFA in writing from Lindenwood University with an emphasis in Script Writing. When she’s not working on a movie set she’s busy writing, taking care of her family, spending time outside, visiting friends, or traveling. She strives to always be kind to others and take care of Mother Earth.