**Return to Sender**

Laura Morris

Macon walked with a limp. His left leg was shorter than the right and bowed under the weight of the US Mail satchel that he’d carried across his chest for twenty years. His doctor recommended a heel to level him out, but Macon insisted he was fine. Life had dealt him a crooked leg and that was that.

Macon liked routine. He ate pizza every day in the local trattoria. It was once a falafel restaurant. Before that Thai. And before that a breakfast place that served buttermilk pancakes that were fluffy as clouds. He missed those pancakes. They used the old Aunt Jemima syrup. Not the all-natural stuff that was popular with the newcomers in town, but the sugary kind that tasted sweet like buttery maple and childhood. “If it ain’t broke,” his mother would say.

Macon’s folks died when he was twelve, when carbon monoxide detectors weren’t code, and faulty gas leaks were deadly enough to make a kid an orphan. He was at camp that summer. He came home to sirens and two bodies being loaded into a van, zipped up in white sacks. He couldn’t remember what his parents looked like after that. Except from pictures. Over time their memories faded and all he could conjure up were the white sacks. Sometimes he’d imagine them sitting in the living room, like Halloween ghosts, holes poked in their sacks for eyes. They’d ask him about school, girls and the latest on the baseball trades. And then they’d talk late into the night. He missed them, but that’s just what happens in life. At least, that’s what happened in his life.

As an adult, Macon pretty much kept to himself. He was pleasant enough and said hello when greeted, but not outgoing or overly social. He took pride in his job and was never late. He was the perfect candidate for the US Postal Service, according to his superior. Reliable like an old German clock. Delivering mail, six days a week, without fail. And he made people feel good about their lives.

So, that day in September, when he stood in the middle of the train tracks, outside of town, where the northern rail cuts a wedge through the Ohio farmland, people had no answers.

Old Burt was the one to spot Macon planted between the rails, his bowed leg steady under his mail satchel, as the 4:13 raced his way. “Hey! The train! Get outta the way!” Old Burt hollered. Macon looked up and waved but didn’t move. A big smile stretched across his face, like a postcard greeting.

“The train was just too fast,” says Old Burt, who tells the story again and again when primed with good whiskey. “But here’s the damndest thing. They couldn’t find a trace of him anywhere. Just his bag—without a scratch on it.”

Old Burt would stare into space, unable to grapple with the magnitude of possibilities. “It’s like he vanished into thin air.” He’d then motion to the bartender for another drink and mumble to himself, “The damndest thing.”