

**an extra-pspatial pSecret pSociety tale**



**Lost in Lost Cove** a novelette by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | June 2018

## **Lost in Lost Cove**

by Mike Bozart

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[[ ] Convention for the thoughts of the characters in this novelette:

*Adrian's thoughts are in this color/shade. / Linda's thoughts are in this color/shade. / Daryl's thoughts are in this color/shade. / Wondering man's thoughts are in this color/shade.*

Adrian and Linda were a Caucasian, actively fit, not-that-much-out-of-the-ordinary American couple now in their mid-20s, who had met in 2012 at UNCC (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) in a needing-three-science-hours-to-graduate, elective, fun-fundamentals-of-‘gee-geology?’ class during their senior years. When Adrian whispered to Linda something about not knowing schist from Shinola during an assistant professor’s talk on metamorphic rocks, he won her heart via wry-dyed humor. She guffawed uncontrollably in the two-overhead-fluorescent-lamps-blown shadows, and eventually had to excuse herself from the 222-seat lecture hall on that cold, cobalt-blue-skied February day. The two were now living together in the Kilborne Park area of east Charlotte. They were tentatively thinking about getting married in May of 2017, some 13 months away.

On Friday night, April 15<sup>th</sup>, at 9:29, Adrian’s cell phone lit up and began playing the original Star Wars theme (his annoying-to-Linda ringtone). He answered the call.

“Hey Daryl. What’s up, buddy?” *Wonder what he’s doing now. Simply no telling. Hope he’s not calling from jail wanting bail money.*

“Oh, not much, man. Same old thing up here in the major metropolis of Pineola.” [a tiny town in the northwestern North Carolina mountains, located at the southern junction of US 221 and NC 181] *Adrian probably just got through screwing Linda. No, I bet that she just got through screwing him. She’s a horned-saddle rider all the way. Probably left the lucky boy sore. Bet they’re still going at it like rabbits. No, that frenzy*

*probably ended years ago. / Same old thing? Not sure what the most recent 'old thing' was. Lost track. Oh, wait ...*

*"Are you still working in real estate?" Why would he ask such a question? Guess he thinks I'm still flighty. / God only knows what he's doing now. Hope he's not trying to recruit me into some pyramid scheme. No, not another MLM [multi-level marketing] scam. Please, dear God, no.*

*"Yep, I'm still selling cliff faces to flat-thinking Floridians, Adrian. I price the craggy parcels by the vertical acre." Vertical acre. He's still got his loony, glue-sniffing-induced sense of humor.*

Adrian half-chuckled and then coughed. "Careful there, partner. Real estate fraud will put you in a new home – prison." *Woah! He really thought I was serious. Apparently my stock with him is still in the crapper.*

"Don't worry, Adrian; your cautionary advice will be heeded going forward. But, all cliffing [*sic*] aside, how would you two like to come up tomorrow and do some hiking? The weather will be splendid. Highs in the mid-60s [Fahrenheit; 18 to 19° Celsius] with no rain." *Did he really say 'cliffing'? A mountain hike would be great. Could use the exercise. Wonder if Linda will want to go. Probably not.*

"Uh, that sounds very enticing, Daryl. I'll run it by the better half and get back with you by ten o'clock. Oh, where did you want to meet?" *Wow! He seems genuinely interested.*

"Little Lost Cove Trailhead. It's south of Roseboro Road near Linville, but on the southeastern side of the Blue Ridge

Parkway. It should come up on your map app. I'm looking at it right now on Google Maps." *Is there a Big Lost Cove, too? There it is. Why is it called Lost Cove? How does one lose a whole cove? What nonsense I'm thinking. Man, I'm still high from that single hit. [of marijuana] Wonder if Daryl still tokes. I bet he does. Early and often, I would wager.*

"Ok, man. Got it. I see that spot now. I'll be getting back with you shortly to let you know if we're in. Thanks for calling."

"Sure. Later." *What are the odds of them both coming up here tomorrow? 4:5? Nah, probably more like 50-50.*

Adrian walked to the master bedroom, where long-black-haired, 5'-5" (1.65 meters tall), busty, jeans-and-T-shirt-clad Linda was lying on their king-size bed listening to her new, just-received-in-the-mail CD (compact disc): *The Puzzle Master* by The Man from RavCon. *This music makes me feel like I'm in another realm as a nonhuman entity, navigating a hyper-dimension. It's some kind of surreal game, and the prize is continuance.*

"Get a phone call, honey?" Linda asked as she turned her head to the left to look at dark-brown-haired, 5'-11" (1.80 meters tall), somewhat-bill-nosed Adrian. *Wonder whom he was talking with. Such a strange time for a call. Was it his ex? No, he can't stand her. Why'd I even think that?*

"Yeah, sure did, hon," Adrian replied as he took a seat on the side of the wide mattress. *Just maintain a casual tone.*

"Who was it?" she enquired with her penciled eyebrows raised, showcasing her cocoa-brown irises. *Hope she*

*doesn't flip out when I tell her. / Don't think it was a female. Maybe just an old drinking buddy. Or, maybe it was his dad. Or, maybe that kooky uncle. Hope not. Jack always gives him crazy ideas.*

“Daryl,” Adrian answered in a relaxed voice. “He invited us to go hiking with him tomorrow. It’s somewhere really cool up in the mountains. It should be fun and interesting. It’s a great, picturesque area of Pisgah National Forest, honey, and the weather will be perfect for hiking tomorrow: not too hot, and not too cold.” *Get ready for the ‘Nah.’ / Who in the world is Daryl? Never heard of anyone named Daryl except for the Daryl Hall of Hall & Oates. ‘Oh-ho, here she comes, she’s a maneater.’ Sally’s song. I should call her this weekend. I bet I forget again.*

“Daryl? I don’t remember ever meeting a Daryl. Who is he?” *Good, she forgot about that crazy night. Oh, that’s right; she was passed-out before Daryl showed up and started acting nutty. Whew! / Hope he’s not some weirdo. Some of his old friends from the west side [of Charlotte] are certifiable, first-order wack-jobs.*

“Oh, just a longtime friend from the old neighborhood,” Adrian calmly stated. “He moved up to the mountains a few years ago. He’s a cool guy. You’ll like him.” *Anticipating a big, fat, juicy Yes vote now. / Maybe. Maybe I won’t.*

“Does he have a girlfriend?” Linda asked out of a sudden wave of curiosity. *Where did that come from? The unfathomable female mind. Oh, it was probably triggered by that sexual psychology course she took her junior year.*

“You know, sweetie, I’m really not sure.” *He’s not sure? Men can be so incurious about each other.*

“Has he ever had a girlfriend?” *Commence the interrogation. I feel like I’m Daryl’s court-appointed attorney.*

“Yeah, I believe so.” *He ‘believes’ so. Whatever!*

“If he’s gay, bisexual, asexual, or pansexual, just tell me. You know that any inclination is fine with me, dear. I’d just like to know. That’s all.” *She’s really missing her calling.*

“I’m pretty sure that he’s heterosexual, hon.” *Hope that satisfies her. / He’s being a coy boy. I’ll let him off the stand.*

“You guys are so damn oblivious, hon. We girls know everything about our female friends.” *Everything?*

Adrian cleared his throat. “So, would you like to go?” *Loverboy really wants to do this. It’s so obvious. Oh, why not? Nothing’s planned for tomorrow. My period is over a week away. It might be fun and adventurous. Might even discover something cool. Why, who knows? Hopefully we don’t cross a mama black bear! Being slowly eaten by a bear. Gosh, that would suck! Oh, just relax. Probably have a greater chance of being struck by lightning. [Statistically, such is the case.]*

After an approaching overdramatic, seven-second pause, Linda smiled. “Ok, I’m game. When do we leave?” *Yes! My strategy worked. For once.*

“I’ll text him now for the details, honey.” *Details. Ha.*

The next, brisk-to-chilly, patchy-radiation-fog morning; they were exiting their two-bedroom, 1½-bath, 1,001-square-foot (93 square meters) house's taupe-colored side door at 8:13 with knapsacks in hand. They had a 115-mile (185 km), two-hour-and-thirty-three-minute drive in front of them. The agreed-upon meetup time was 11:00 AM sharp.

Traffic was light as they cruised out of the Queen City. Linda quickly fell back asleep. Adrian thought about the day ahead as the white lane-dashes passed by on US 321. He inserted his self-burned CD that he black-felt-tip-pen-titled *Crown Town Cronies*. A novelty-sounding song by The Gamblers Band, *My Neighbor is a Kudzu Vine*, was soon playing. Adrian noticed a wide and tall, tree-devouring patch of the tune-referenced, non-native plant on the right side of the four-lane highway as he heard: 'It grows three feet [almost one meter] about all the time.' *Why, it sure does. That invasive eastern Asian vine sure loves the piedmont of the southeastern United States. It's crazy for the warm, humid climate. Hope Daryl doesn't get too crazy. Hope he's not planning on getting totally wasted up there. A little buzz [slight inebriation] would be fine, but I don't want to be ozoned. [extremely intoxicated] Hope no one gets hurt. Could use a medical situation like another hole in my head. [Adrian had a shunt behind his left ear.] Bet it would take forever to get an ambulance up there. Where would medic even respond from? [Jonas Ridge VFD]*

They had planned to stop at a convenience store for gasoline, drinks and energy bars; and they did so in the sleepy, almost vacant, foothills town of Morganton. It was now 9:55 AM.



“How much farther?” Linda asked while sipping on a chilled, bottled, creamy, vanilla-flavored-coffee concoction.

“Exactly thirty-four miles [54.7 km] and sixty-three minutes. We should be right on time, honey.” *63 minutes!*

“It will take over an hour to go just thirty-four miles?” Linda asked with a disappointed expression.

“Mountain roads, sweetie. Curvy mountain roads.” *I sure wish that he would drop the ‘sweetie’ bit. Maybe I’ll mention it to him later. Don’t want to ruin the vibe. He could get irritable in a flash, and stay that way for the rest of the day. It’s just not worth it. Best to wait until we’re back home.*

They were soon crossing the tea-colored Catawba River on North Green Street (NC 181). After passing the Oak Hill community, the road became a median-less, two-lane highway. The shiny-facets-glimmering-like-mini-mirrors-in-the-still-chilled-though-now-sunlit-asphalt, state-designated, NC DOT (Department of Transportation) scenic byway whipped back and forth like an old, flattened, gray salamander snake. Then at the intersection with Brown Mountain Beach Road, they entered the Pisgah National Forest area. A string of stream-side campgrounds passed by on the left. One of them (Steele Creek) had a tall, light-blue-colored waterslide. *I could see Frank scaling that on his off-road motorcycle. Sure could.*

“Would you slide down that, hon?” Adrian asked his sleepy-once-again, one-quarter-Maltese fiancée. *Woah!*

“No, I don’t think so,” she responded dispassionately. *I sure hope that her energy level picks up for this hike. Most of the trails in that area are rated as strenuous. How can she go back to sleep after drinking all that coffee? Is she immune to caffeine now? / I’ll just close my eyes, and maybe he will stop talking. My anxiety level is rising. I can feel it. Not so sure about this now. Think I should have just let him go alone. Hope we see some other people – decent people – on the trails. Don’t want to be the only ones in the middle of nowhere. And then hear ‘Dueling Banjos’. Yikes!*

As they passed milepost 14 (actually a green metal sign), the highway started to climb more steeply. Dense deciduous woods were on both sides of the winding road. The song titled *Bridge in Amsterdam* by Douglass Thompson was now playing. ‘And the sun is now rising up from the rooftops, and I can’t remember where the hell I am.’ *Ah, that trip to Amsterdam. Wandering around stoned out of my mind in the cool mist. Getting lost. Getting on the wrong tram. Twice! Wonder whatever became of that Slovenian girl in that coffee shop. What was her game? And, what was her name? It began with an ‘S’. Was her name Stephanie? Her impeccable English. Did she stay? Or, did she run off with that spy-like Austrian dude? Did she get her poetry published? Or, did she lose her mind in the thick of it? Well, we’re really getting into the thick of it right here. What a day for a mountain hike. Wonder if Daryl will be on time. I sure hope so.*

Just after milepost 17, there was a gravel road that quickly descended on the right. Adrian studied it closely as the bluesy-to-spacey instrumental *Euler’s Dream* by Tom

Montefusco warbled through the speakers. *Those seven, cross-me-just-once Prussian bridges. Königsberg in the fall. Before the fall. Before the decline. Before Sovietification. [sic] An eerily decaying chord ripples the old, seen-about-it-all Pregel River. A fabulous Baltic ride. A rising Baltic tide. Yeah, that identity equation truly was [Leonhard] Euler's grand slam. He touched all the bases with that one. I read that somewhere. Almost could imagine seeing the ghost of Euler on a day like today, lurking behind a tree with his right eye closed. Wow! That looks like where wild-man Sam and I went hiking. It is. Was it in 2007? Or, was it in 2008? Sure was a cold day. Almost got frostbite. Wonder what Sam is doing right now. Probably his fifth bong hit. [an inhalation of water-pipe-filtered marijuana smoke] Such a consummate stoner. [habitual marijuana smoker] He sure is a good guitarist, though. Wonder what his sister is doing right now. Probably Steve. Or, her oh-my-dear John. Someday I should try to write my thoughts down. Maybe make poems out of them. Or, song lyrics! Yeah, that's it. That might be right up Daryl's alley. He could lay down an ambient drone and I could recite the words with some kind of effect on my voice. Maybe a slight delay and/or echo. Need to run this idea by him. Maybe add loops of bird calls. And ...*

“How much farther?” a very-well-known-to-him-by-now female voice blasted in his right ear, instantly ending his mental meandering, as their black 2009 Jeep Grand Cherokee passed milepost 20.

“Twelve miles [19.31 km] and thirty-one minutes, princess.”  
*Gosh, this is taking forever. The constant curves are nauseating. It might be nice to be an actual princess. 'Ladies*

*and gentleman, I present to you, Linda, the baroness of Baronne.' [a made-up place] Though, is Adrian aspiring enough to be my prince? I can tell that he is content to be working indefinitely at his cousin's warehouse for \$48K a year with small bonuses that barely offset inflation. Yeah, he's quite fine with that modest salary and our small starter home. But to him, that's our end house. At least for our working lives – probably four decades – in Charlotte. Yeah, I can tell that he doesn't want more. In his mind, he's set. He's got me, a house next to a park with a disc-golf course, and a job where he can goof off half the day. He doesn't seem to want to have kids, either. But, I want at least one. Not sure if we'll make it. I think I want more. I know I do. Maybe I can encourage him. Motivate him. Change him. Push him. Harder. We'll see.*

“What an insane road!” Linda exclaimed twenty-three seconds later as Adrian negotiated another tight bend. *What did she expect? There's no straight route up any mountain. Well, maybe if on a funicular. Yeah, like the ones in Pittsburgh. [the Monongahela Incline and the Duquesne Incline in southwestern Pennsylvania] Sure would hate for that thick cable to break. Surely there are safety redundancies. [There are.]*

“Up the Blue Ridge Escarpment we go!” Adrian announced eight seconds later with a generous heap of gusto. *He's really looking forward to this. Wish I were, too. But, I'm not. I'd give anything to be back in bed in Charlotte. Asleep. Dreaming. Oh well, maybe it won't totally suck. Low expectations can easily be exceeded.*

“What’s that over there on the right, hon?” *Wow! It’s already crowded. ‘Wrong time, folks! Nothing luminous to be seen until after dark. Come back after sunset.’*

Adrian continued looking to the southeast at the long, flat-crested, plateau-like, tree-covered mountain’s observation area. “Oh, that’s a popular Brown Mountain overlook, my love. Have you ever heard of the famous Brown Mountain Lights?” *The famous what?*

“No, I sure haven’t. What kind of lights are they?”

“Orb-like ghost lights,” Adrian answered. *Ghost lights? Now, this sounds interesting.*

“What’s the source?” Linda promptly asked, eager to know.

“Now, that’s the million-dollar question, linda [pretty in Spanish] Linda.” *Linda Linda? Repeating my first name. Why? Don’t even ask. Just don’t even ask.*

“Have they ever been investigated?” Linda was intrigued.

“Yes, honey, scientists and amateur sleuths have investigated this localized phenomena over the decades. The eldritch, ridge-hoovering lights were first reported over a century ago – way back in 1913.” *I bet that there weren’t any street lights then. And, very few cars in this area.*

“Well, what do the real scientists have to say?” *The ‘real’ scientists. Love it.*

“Just ordinary sources of light, like headlights and campfires, refracting off of pockets of fog and/or rising swamp gas. It seems to be reported more often after a rainy day.”

“Any chance of rain today?” Linda asked, hoping that Adrian would answer in the affirmative.

“No, none, honey. There's a zero percent chance of precipitation today.” *Darn. / I just know that she wants to come back to that overlook and look for those lights tonight. I guess we could stop for a few minutes. Why not? Might even see something. No need to rush back. Nothing to do on Sunday, and Charlotte isn't going anywhere. Wonder where that elderly gent, who I met back in 2009 on that vista point, is right now. Is he still alive? No way of knowing.*

The conversation fizzled out. Soon they were passing a dirt road on the right that led to the Upper Creek Falls parking lot. *That sure was a fun time. Those beer-drinking Asian girls in bikinis that Sam and I met on the rocks. Where are they now? Didn't I hear something about the taller one going back to China? Maybe she's happily married now in Hong Kong. The shorter one said that she was having boyfriend trouble in Glen Alpine. [a small township just west of Morganton] Was that a possible green light that I blew? Or, was it a STOP sign that I wisely obeyed? And, that swing over the upper-upper waterfall. That redheaded guy and his presumed Amerasian son on that swing. Howling and joking. And then laughing when the rope broke. They were lucky to hit the cold water – and not that big, hard, slanting rock. Wait. Did the rope really break? Or, did they almost wait too long to release from the rope as it swung back? No. The*

*rope partially broke near maximum height, and they bailed. Wow! My memory is already half-shot. And, that three-generation, oh-so-harmonious, Vietnamese-American family all gathered around that hand-built, stones-cobbled-together pool. Had they already corralled an inattentive, sandy-bottom-resting catfish? Were they going to cook and eat it right there? A scene in every section of the river that day. Such a bizarre life this is. Humans are some mighty strange creatures, and I don't exclude myself. / What in the world is he thinking about now? Something flaky on the edges, I'm sure.*

"Two spectacular waterfalls over there, hon," Adrian finally informed. "I hiked them with Daryl six or seven years ago."

"You never told me that," Linda retorted. *Huh? Her mood is not good. I think that she's worried about the upcoming hike. Yeah, I can feel her anxiety.*

"Well, you never asked, hon. It was just the two of us. Some majestic hiking, but nothing remarkable happened. Just a day hike – an up and back." *Nothing remarkable. Up and back. Hmmm ...*

"Who did you 'up and back', Romeo?" *What in the world?*

"No one, honey. Sheez." *Got him.*

"Just checking your reaction. You can relax now, hon. You passed the test." *Why is she digging at me so much? Hope she's now done with the inquiry.*

“You know, honey, maybe you should be looking at law school.” *Ah, yes, if we only had the money.*

“Why do you say that, Mr. Dravonowski?” [Adrian’s last name] *Yeah, I could see her strutting around in front of the judge and jury in her form-hugging, bright-red skirt and white blazer. Is she going to be happy with me long-term as a purchasing manager? I’m not a corporate-ladder-climber type. Well, she probably already knows that. ‘Women just know these things.’ That’s what Janet said. God rest her soul. She should have known better than to get mixed up with a raging cokehead. [cocaine addict]*

“You would make a great prosecutor, or a rapier-witted defense attorney,” Adrian replied after an awkward pause. *Damn straight I would. What is really on his mind?*

“No, honey, I’m not a lawyer type. Courtrooms give me the creeps.” *Sweet little lies keep the world going ‘round. And keep our relationship intact.*

Soon they were passing a freshly painted, wooden, green sign with white letters on the right, next to an unlined, gate-closed-and-padlocked asphalt road.

“Ah, Upper Creek Acres,” Adrian announced. “Still some good lots in there for not a whole lot of money, hon. Could you live up here someday?” *No fucking way!*

“No, dear, I’m not cut out for that much isolation and solitude. I’m afraid that I’d go nuts.” *And, he would, too. He just doesn’t know it. Yet. / Not me. I’d love to move up here when we retire, if not sooner. Maybe we are not really that*



*compatible after all. Should we really be getting married? 'If you have any doubts, don't do it, son.' Dad's wise words. He should know. Probably why he never remarried. I can tell that he is a marriage skeptic. Oh, but no one woman will ever be a perfect match. Linda's ultra-cool, attractive, and smart. If we make it to our early 30s, we should be fine and settled. Maybe push the wedding date out further. Yeah, just delay it. Delay, delay, delay.*

A few minutes later they were passing through the Jonas Ridge community, which primarily consisted of a Marathon gasoline station/convenience store, a stamp-size post office, and a snow-tubing slope that had closed for the season over a month ago.

As NC 181 began to run parallel with the Blue Ridge Parkway (just off to the left, well within eyesight), the maundering instrumental *Beyond the Gate* by Pax Imperium arrested the sonic attention of the vehicle's two occupants. *Hope we get way beyond the gate – the gate of tedium – today. Hope I get new ideas from this upcoming hike. This song is already giving me some. Spaces and places. Spaces in places. Odd paces with old shoelaces. / Hope we don't get stopped by a locked NFS [National Forest Service] gate like we did down in the Brevard area last summer. Hope this Daryl dude did his homework.*

Adrian then slowed the Jeep down and turned right onto Pittman's Gap Road, a paved, two-lane feeder to mountain-ridge residences. As they rounded a sweeping left curve and passed Rhododendron Run on the right, Linda unleashed her habitual question in her usual monotone.

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