

Escape from Covid

“You’re looking glum, Mary,” said Ted as he brought in her afternoon cup of tea and biscuit. “Thinking of something for your writers group?”

“Yes,” said Mary, with a sigh, “but I can’t concentrate. Just as we thought we would be going to Tanya’s for Christmas, things have become uncertain again. We’re told this omicron variant is spreading like mad; Boris Johnson with his usual clownish bonhomie tells us that we’ll all have boosters in next to no time; but the doctors say they don’t have the staff to administer them at that rate and Chris Whitty tells us to be careful. It’s confusion again like last year.”

“Not quite,” Ted reminded her. “Eventually quite strict rules came in last year and we had to stay here alone. Remember how Tanya and Brian and the kids came over and stood at the bottom of the drive, after leaving the presents half way up, and how we retrieved them and left ours there for them to get? It doesn’t seem quite that bad this year. Anyway, we’ve both had our booster jabs so even if we get it, it should not be too bad.”

“That’s not the point,” said Mary. “If we do get it we’ll have to isolate and we don’t want to be in isolation again over Christmas. Oh, I’m sick and tired of Covid. There doesn’t seem to be any escape from it.”

“No, there doesn’t,” agreed Ted. “Who’d have thought we would have had two years of all these Covid restrictions?”

“And confusion!” added Mary with feeling.

“But come on, Mary,” said Ted, trying to sound encouraging. “Isn’t creative writing supposed to be escapism. At least you can escape there.”

“It’s not necessarily escapist,” said Mary. “You remember a few months ago we had to write a piece on the ‘connotations of Covid’; that was hardly escapism!”

“Oh yes,” said Ted. “So you did. All the more reason then to be forgetting Covid and getting on with a piece for the writing group. What’s the topic this time?”

“Escape,” replied Mary.

“Escape,” repeated Ted, musing. “Wasn’t that your theme once before when you wrote that long poem in Longfellow’s Hiawathan metre about Aeneas escaping from Troy as it fell?”

“Yes,” said Mary. “I was half-tempted to re-read that poem, hoping no one would remember. But that would be cheating and I’m sure someone would have remembered.”

“Yes, I expect they would,” agreed Ted. “Couldn’t you write about some similar escape?”

“Like what?” asked Mary.

“Well, er, well,” said Ted, “er, some hero escaping from Atlantis?”

“At least Troy was real,” replied Mary with emphasis. “You remember we went there just a few years ago. *And* even if Aeneas was fictional, the legend is old and well known. But Atlantis – well, that’s probably mythical itself, there are no established myths of heroes that escaped *and* I don’t want to get mixed up with all the cranks that have written about Atlantis.”

“OK, OK!” said Ted. “Forget that! But wasn’t it about two years ago that you wrote that story about a young boy called Tim and how he escaped from the Brexit monster, *Brexitus horribilis*?”

“Yes,” sighed Mary. “But then there was no Covid and there was still a hope we might have had a confirmatory referendum on May’s withdrawal agreement and have avoided Brexit. It was a

time when there was still optimism about; I liked writing that story. It was fun. But now all that's changed."

"Maybe," said Ted, "but couldn't you write a story about someone escaping the clutches of the Covid monster, *Covidius mortifer*, and escaping into a parallel time-zone with no Covid?"

"No, I couldn't, Ted," said Mary. "It'd be too similar to Tim and the Brexit monster story. Besides Brexit *has* happened; all the pre-referendum Leave promises have been broken and Covid has been with us for two years. I'm not in the mood for a light-hearted story with echoes of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

"But couldn't you try?" said Ted encouragingly.

"Look, Ted," replied Mary, "if I were to write about a Covid monster, it would be more like something out of Bram Stoker than out of Douglas Adams – a horrible creature with a thirst for human blood – no, for human souls, rather. Why, I might even make it *Covidia mortifer* and have it mate with *Brexitus horribilis* and produce a really frightening offspring ..."

Ted interrupted with a laugh. "Wow!" he added. "That sounds fun; and what would you call it?"

"No!" exclaimed Mary forcibly. "It would *not* be fun. It's too dreadful; the story would be dark and terrible with no escape. I would not enjoy writing it for one minute and, with no escape, it would not exactly be suitable."

"Mary, this is not good," said Ted. "You really do need to escape; Covid's getting you down."

"And Brexit," murmured Mary.

"OK," said Ted, "and Brexit. All the more reason you need to escape."

"But how?" asked Mary, wistfully.

"Let's see," mused Ted. "In your story about Tim escaping the Brexit monster didn't Zokran's Dad explain that finding your way through spacetime was largely a matter of mind control?"

"That's right," said Mary rather wearily. "But I made that up. You can't escape Covid."

"But," said Ted with a touch of enthusiasm. "You must have got that idea from somewhere, and all that stuff about Zokran and traveling through spacetime."

"Only from my imagination," said Mary.

"Or," said Ted, "from your *intuition*. Aren't women supposed to be endowed with intuition?"

"That's silly," said Mary.

"Is it?" asked Ted. "What have we to lose? If it works, we've escaped; if it doesn't then we're no worse off. Let's join hands and try a bit of mind control spacetime travel."

"All right," said Mary, too tired to argue. "Just to humour you."

So they both joined hands and closed their eyes. Ted tried hard and with optimism; Mary at first hesitated but then tried with a desperation so great, so anguished and intense that on a planet somewhere in the region of Alpha Centauri Zokran's father sensed her desperation. 'Oh dear,' he thought, 'I'd better set the coordinates as I set them for Tim.'

Mary thought she felt a sudden surge of energy flood through her but when she and Ted opened their eyes, nothing had changed. "There," she said, "I knew it was nonsense. Please take

the cups away and let me get on as best I can.”

“I wonder,” said Ted quietly as he picked up their cups and saucers and went out.

That evening as they watched the news on television, they heard absolutely nothing about Covid or coronavirus. It was indeed obvious from the news they saw that they had escaped into a quite different time-zone where, among other things, there was no global pandemic.

Ted smiled. “Well, Mary,” he said, “we *have* escaped. There’s your story for your creative writing group – I suppose the group’s still there in this time zone; we didn’t will that away.”

“No, we didn’t,” said Mary. “But if I did write the story, they’d never believe it.”

In the end, because she could not think of anything else, she did write it and she was right: they did not believe it. She and Ted had a great Christmas with their daughter Tanya and family, where they were joined by their son and his family from the USA.

There, dear readers, after having in the past listened in on several of their afternoon tea conversations, we must bid a final farewell to Mary and Ted for, alas, there is no escape for us who remain in our Covid-ridden timezone.