

Far from the Maddening Lockdown
#14 - Genre: Magical Realism (1055 words)
By Melitón Moya

Two humans and two sprites stood looking at each other in the yoga studio at the back of Gizmo's, the small family-owned café Mary enjoyed visiting.

Aronia was quick to ask, "Who's this handsome man, Mary?"

"Forest Wang. He's Mrs. Vargas's son-in-law."

"What are both of you doing here?" Henry questioned.

"We're wandering through time." Mary looked at the two of them. "Where have you been? Why all the dust? You look like you've been out picking cotton."

"Too early for that. We were helping the Old Man, our friend, pick potatoes when you called out to us. We came as soon as we could." Henry handed Mary a russet potato. "What are we doing here? You sounded urgent, Mary."

"Yes, my dear, you look preoccupied." Aronia walked over to where Mary was sitting and gave her a big hug."

Mary's anxiety was back to where it was before she sat down to meditate. "You would be preoccupied too if you had witnessed what Forest and I just did at the Cine El Rey."

Aronia put her arm around her. "Tell us, my dear."

"I don't want to talk about it. It can't be real. I don't want to make it real by talking about it. You tell them, Forest. It was your idea for us to go back in time."

"Mary, don't you think they already know everything we know?"

Henry sighed. "Forest's right, Mary. We already know. Don't worry about it."

Aronia patted Mary's hand. "Henry's right. Don't preoccupy yourself with that now, my dear. I think you need time out from being alone."

Mary turned abruptly to look at Aronia, "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't take it personally, Mary. Just about everybody on earth needs a time out from aloneness about now. Everyone's going a little stir crazy in their own way. Or, haven't you heard?"

"Well, yes I have. I've been hearing all about that on television. People are having a hard time with the isolation. Loneliness. Strange dreams. Ghosts. Some strange form of grieving is going on. Trouble focusing and getting things done. Psychologists are saying people are dealing with radical uncertainty. What? Do you think I've gone stir crazy these past forty days! Do you think I'm being paranoid because I'm scared about an invisible deadly virus lingering everywhere, waiting for victims to make one deadly mistake in their lives?"

Aronia squeezed Mary's hand, "Nobody's saying that, Mary. We'll figure this out together. But, Henry, don't you think we should be getting back to the Old Man's place to see if he still needs our help. You know how much both of us love being out there with him."

“Yes, that’s a great idea!” Henry looked around. “This is a very nice place but it doesn’t feel right to be here. Let’s go back to where the Old Man is in time.”

“I’ve never been able to understand why humans can’t get enough of the past,” Aronia turned her attention to Forest. “What do you think?”

Forest looked at Mary. “I agree with Aronia. Let’s go back.”

Mary nodded and before she knew it, the four of them were back in her living room.

“If all of life could be that easy. One moment we’re back in time and the next we’re here in the present. How strange. Then again, we do it all the time, don’t we?”

Forest gave Mary a sincere look of understanding, “Get used to it, Mary. The whole world just became stranger than we could have imagined when we greeted the new year.”

“Let’s all close our eyes and hold hands,” Henry directed.

They did and traveled through space to a place lost in time between Santa Monica and San Perlita.

Mary opened her eyes to see a bucolic wonderland. “Where are we? Are we still in the Rio Grande Valley?” She looked around at a pristine area of the Valley where only the present is of any consequence to the people living there. “Absolutely beautiful! Where is this? This place looks like a place time forgot. I don’t mean that in a bad way. It looks like a place that’s here and not here at the same time. Am I making sense?”

“You’re making perfect sense, Mary,” Henry grinned widely.

Mary could not believe her eyes. “Is this place for real?”

“Yes, it is,” Aronia had an even wider grin on her face than Henry’s. “The magical Rio Grande Valley of Texas is blessed with the juxtaposition of yesteryears and today. Tomorrow never seems to arrive and, when it does, it feels like today. Tomorrow belongs to the big cities in Texas. I don’t understand why people want to leave. People don’t know how much they give up by leaving until they’ve been gone for a while. And, you’re not very far from home, Mary.”

“I’m not? It looks like worlds away from where I spend all my time glued to the iMac, television, and keeping an immaculate home no one seems to appreciate except me. I’m always working! Why?”

“You’re an American, Mary. Americans love to work.” Forest paused. “We love to work and spend the money even before we earn it and then work some more. Work. Work. Work.”

Mary asked, “Where’s the Old Man? I thought we were going to visit an old man.”

“There.” Henry pointed at a small white house with a green trim she had not noticed.

A soft, even cadenced, hypnotic voice came from behind Mary. “Here I am. Welcome to my humble corner of the world. You must be thirsty after all the time and space traveling you’ve been doing.”

Mary wondered how the Old Man knew that but did not ask.

“I’ve got a special concoction I make from mesquite pods and a few other secret ingredients I think will tease your tastes and your senses. Henry, show them to the back of the house, please. I’ll be right back.”

The sound of the Old Man's hypnotic voice lingered after he left. Mary noticed she was no longer preoccupied with what had been going on in her mind since the lockdown. She wondered how much of what had been happening in her life the past forty days was real and how much she may have invented.

If only Sylvia could be here.

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