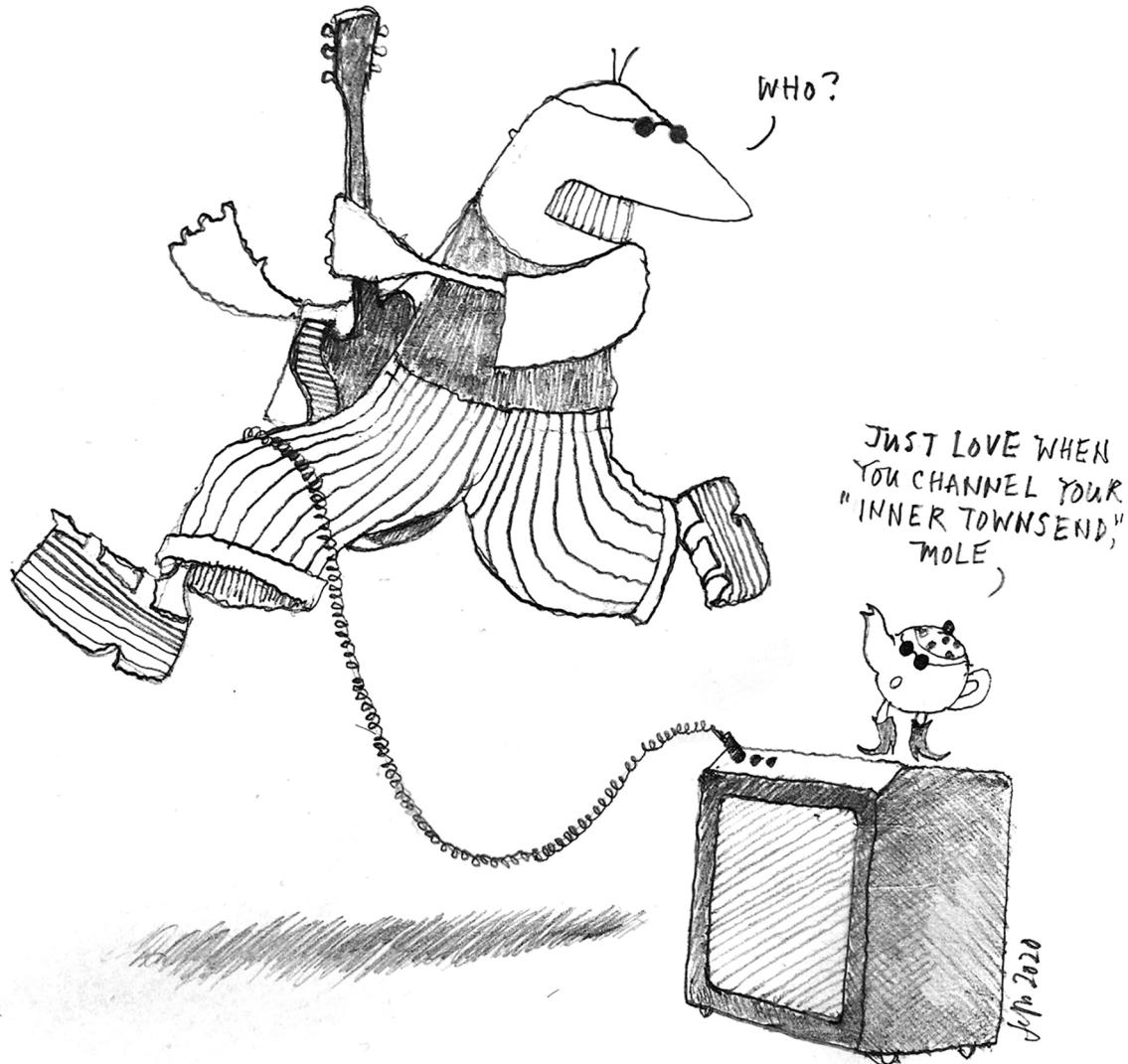


STICKY WICKET

Corona V – not ready for normal

Mole

Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - www.peterjeffsart.com

Rain, rain, rain, rain. I don't much like walking in the rain. I'm *trying* to walk a few miles every day, but not so great when it's raining. Yesterday, my shoes and hat were really wet, and Ms. Mole yelled at me when I got home. Pretty normal. Today, I've had many 'meetings,' like yesterday and the day before that. Tomorrow, I'm in virtual reality all day. Maybe this weekend I'll get to that big stack of papers I'm supposed to review. Where does the time go? Listen, I don't mind getting together with the Molets to talk about their projects and to give encouragement. And I certainly don't mind getting together to assess the continuing plans for dealing with this crisis. And I *definitely* don't mind getting together with friends, like in my weekly meetings with Dolphin, Red Fox, and Quokka (last time, Rabbit joined as well, which was great). But some of these meetings? Like slogging through the rain.

If you are joining us from the future, we are deep in the midst of the Terrible Pandemic. I hope things are really good where (when?) you are now. I imagine you complaining about papers and grants and experiments that don't work. You know, *normal things*. I mean, normal for those of us who do this biomedical research thing. Oh, I so hope you're not reading this in a future that includes hordes of shuffling zombies. That would be pretty awful. I guess we'll have to wait and see.

Some of us, like Rabbit, live in really smart countries that did the Terrible Pandemic with wisdom, forethought, and scientific insight. She is getting ready to slowly bring the lab back from virtual reality to real reality. I know it will be slow, and very careful, and they will manage it. Must be super nice.

Quokka's country is heading that way, taking things very seriously. Good for them. I think they're going to be okay.

Some of us, like Red Fox, live in regions where informed leadership is working hard to keep people as safe as possible, weathering this stormy time. Frustrating, and I know she would love to get things going again, but she also really understands nasty microbes and is happy to do the right thing, as are most of those around her. Must also be nice. Not as nice as Rabbit's situation, but still.

And then there are some of us, like Dolphin and myself, who live in places where we don't know what is going to happen from one day to the next. We are bracing for bad decisions that will likely go very wrong. There is a bag of dog waste on fire on the steps of the powers that be, and someone just rang the bell. We know what will happen next. (No, I never, ever did this when I was a Molet, but I heard about it. And when I was very young, I thought it was really funny. It's not funny. Okay, a little, but I'm trying to lighten the mood here.)

But really? I'm not ready for normal. I know that, for most of us, *we're* not ready. But that isn't what I'm talking about. I'm not anxious to start getting stressed out about deadlines and rejections. I don't miss mad dashes through airports trying to catch the connecting flight when my last one came in late (oh please, don't make me spend the night here!). I'm not nostalgic for really nasty reviews of my papers. Our lab spending is actually under control for once.

I'm getting to spend time with my family. I call my elderly parents every day. I like not setting my alarm clock. Not driving so much is nice, too.

But most of all, I find that I'm being much more sympathetic of my colleagues, the ones whose papers I'm reviewing. When I find problems, I try to figure out if they *really* need to do the extra work. We'll see if they feel the same about the paper I have out for review. That would be nice.

I'm not sure that I'm ready for the old normal. Of course, I definitely want the Terrible Pandemic to end. I want people to stop getting horribly sick, and I definitely want nobody to die from this anymore. I absolutely want people to be able to go back to work, and I hope we can help all of those who have lost their jobs. But we know that this will finally happen; someday, this will finally be over. And we will hopefully have a new normal, with people being much more aware of how easily disease can spread, and what we can do to reduce such spread. And maybe, some of the *nice* that is going around could be part of that, too. I know, I'm probably asking too much.

Hey, future person, reading this: Is there a new normal? Are people a little nicer? Did we learn anything at all? Or is it like Pete Townsend sang, "In with the new boss, same as the old boss?" Did we get fooled again?

Don't tell me. I want to go on dreaming that *something* good may come from this awful thing. Join me for some 'tea,' and let's listen to some old Who. Yeh, people try to put us d-d-d-down. But me, I'm just going to keep getting up. See you next week, and hang in there.