

# Tales of lock-down

## Of the second lock-down

And of Christmas "not quite in lock-down  
but almost"



Marie Bernat

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*What if, just like nature, Faery had more space?*

*Creatures from fairy tales and myths are now freer to move around in the open, and less at risk of exposing themselves.*

*This said, they are still really good at masking and posing as humans or animals, and at hiding in their environment.*

## *The tales of lock-down*

### I. The old lady and the caring neighbour

Mrs Watson was coming back with her shopping, wobbling along the street, when that really quiet yet eccentric neighbour of hers – he has long silver hair and purple eyes, can you imagine! – offered to help her.

Of course they had to keep their distances, so she first set her bag on the floor and walked away before he picked it up.

Once at her house, she went in and he set the bag on the porch.

“Thank you very much, young man, it was very kind of you! I never quite know what to make of you but you seem like a sweet young man!”

The young man, slightly older than the old lady, kept his composure.

“I understand, I have a bit of a strange look, but I assure you, I am very friendly!” He smiled, a warm, genuine smile. “Would you like me to do your shopping next time, so you don’t have to carry it?”

“It would be lovely of you, but I wouldn’t want to impose. And I need to do some walking.”

“I really don’t mind, and it’s probably safer for you to walk unhindered by a heavy bag. I could do your weekly shopping and you can go on a walk when you want to. I can even walk along, 6 feet away, if you want some company.”

Mrs Watson agreed, and found herself quite happy with their arrangement. So did Aldaran, a young 90 years old fae.

He gets the shopping done and watch over Janine during her walks, and his adoptive grand-mother, as she jokingly says, bakes cakes for them to share. Really good cakes.

## II. The man and the wolf

Pierre was leaning out of his sitting room window, on the second floor, like every evening since the beginning of the lock-down at the time “between dog and wolf”.

Just as he was thinking that he noticed a dog walking in the middle of the quiet street.

The animal wasn't running but Pierre thought that it behaved as if it was on its way to do something important, which made him chuckle. A dog going to a meeting or to work, just like humans would do, was a funny idea.

The dog stopped, then, right under a street lamp and turned around to look directly at Pierre. That's when he noticed the pointed ears, and the shape of his snout and tail. It looked like a wolf, from that distance.

“It must be a wolfhound! I've never seen one around here. Maybe he ran away. I hope he'll go home by himself.”

The dog nodded to him, or at least that's the impression he got, and that puzzled him.

Dogs don't nod to people.

For the next week, every evening at around the same time, the dog would be there and nod at him. Pierre decided he was imagining the dog was nodding, but that it might have somehow taken a liking to him

On the following Monday, Pierre went out shopping – for the basic staples – and, as he was debating which tea to try this time, he looked away to see a stranger staring at him. His eyes were a strange colour, brown and golden, and the fact that he nodded to him before being on his way was even stranger considering he didn't know him.

That evening, the wolfhound was back and nodded. Pierre ran down the stairs this time, but was too slow.

The following day, when he checked his letterbox out of habit, it gave him a reason to go down the stairs once a day, he found an envelope with a selection of tea bags in it. The strangest thing, however, was the slight dent on the envelope in the shape of dog teeth, as if it had been delicately carried by, say, a wolfhound.

The lock-down was getting a lot more interesting.

## ***The tales of (the second) lock-down***

### I. The man and the wolf (the sequel)

*Eight month earlier...*

Pierre was coming home from groceries shopping when He noticed the wolfhound. It was early for him, but what surprised Pierre the most was that he was sitting next to the front door of his apartment building, as if he was waiting for someone.

When the wolfhound came up to him, he understood that that someone was him.

“Hello you!” Pierre greeted him whilst scratching him behind the ears: “You were waiting for me?”

The dog wagged his tail in an happy manner. He had beautiful golden brown eyes. Pierre stored that information at the back of his mind. Strangers met in shops don’t turn into wolfhounds. Anyway, that sort of things doesn’t exist, right?

“Come on, Let’s go upstairs and I’ll call the vets in the area to try and find your owners. They could have put a collar on you...”

The dog climbed the stairs staying close to him and Pierre was surprised with his behaviour. He acted as if he was his dog.

They reached the landing, Pierre set his bags on the floor whilst finding his keys and they were soon inside.

Pierre made his way to the kitchen space to put his shopping away – he had a small flat with one bedroom and one room “for everything” as he called it. It suited him, he was quite solitary and wasn’t planning on inviting people.

That’s when he heard a slight cough. He turned around, and it was lucky that he already put his bag down as he would have dropped them otherwise.

A man with brown hair, about 6 feet tall and with golden brown eyes, was standing stark naked in front of his front door.

The dog had mysteriously disappeared.

Whilst one part of his brain was trying to take in those informations and organise them in a logical way – which it usually knew how to do very well – the other part was trying to understand what the stranger was asking him.

“I’m sorry to surprise you like this, and I will explain everything, but can I borrow some clothes, please? We can’t keep them on when we change.”

In automatic pilot, Pierre guided him towards his room, showed him his wardrobe and stood there, slightly bewildered .

“I’m borrowing a pair of boxers, sweatpants and a t-shirt. I’m always hot so I’ll be fine like this.”

“Erm OK?” mumbled Pierre.

The stranger got dressed, took him by the hand and brought him back to the lounge. He made him sit on the sofa and went to the kitchen.

“I’m going to make you some tea, it’s the best remedy in that kind of situations.” He paused for a second. “Actually, it cures pretty much everything.”

He grabbed two mugs, found some tea and held the box above his head, it was tea with peach – “Great, you bought this one! It’s good, isn’t it?”, to which Pierre answered by a vague noise – and put the kettle on.

A few minutes later he had brought the mugs and was sitting with Pierre, who was looking at him as if he was a ghost. Or any type of creature that wasn’t supposed to exist and had just made him question his – limited – understanding of life and the universe.

“I assume that’s when I explain everything?”

Pierre finally managed to speak in an almost coherent manner:

“This isn’t possible! The dog... You... I... It doesn’t exist!”

The stranger smiled.

“If I wasn’t who I am, I wouldn’t believe in my own existence either, I assure you. My name is Alaric<sup>1</sup> Shaw<sup>2</sup>, and you are Pierre Dubois.”

Pierre merely nodded. The man – or the wolfhound? – was bound to know his name, considering he had put an envelope in his mail box.

“We don’t know how to explain this phenomenon, and yet we have been doing researches for a long time. Some of us are skilled scientists, but even they haven’t been able to understand the mechanism that allows our body to ... reorganise itself, in a way.” He stopped. “Should I keep going?”

Pierre nodded.

“We are not sure either of what determines which animal we change into, even though there are family lines. For example, two wolves will have a wolf cub, but in the case of a wolf and a tiger – I know such a couple – it’s a surprise. They have a little panther, by the way, really cute. However, the animal sets the body mass, or the other way around.”

“So there are no domestic cats, for example?”

“No, but rather tigers, panthers, lions... A bit big for a cat living in a flat!”

They smiled at each other.

Pierre was starting to accept what he had seen, or not, actually, but needed one last proof:

“I didn’t see you change. Show me.”

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1 According to my mother, the mount Alaric has the shape of our dog when he was lying down.

2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaw\\_\(name\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaw_(name))

Alaric didn't ask him if he was certain, he could hear it in his voice, and he knew it was necessary to go through this.

He undressed – Pierre was surprised to find he enjoyed the view – and ... changed.

His body reorganised itself, the term was perfectly chosen, but there was no other way to describe it. There were no sound of broken bones or other unpleasant sounds, like it's written in stories about werewolves, and Alaric didn't seem to have felt any pain. He simply had now the shape of a wolfhound.

*Present days...*

Pierre looked up from his laptop and looked at the man seated at the other end of the table, himself also on his laptop, who was sighing.

"You too?" asked Pierre.

Alaric looked up.

"If I have to do that request one more time, I will scream."

"It's not the full moon, though, is it?"

Alaric looked at him partly annoyed and partly amused. His partner's humour could be bit repetitive, but routine can be nice.

"Which reminds me that I forgot to tell you that we are meeting at the park on the next full moon with my friends. Will you come?"

"In the middle of a lock-down?"

"They are not going to control a pack of wolfhounds."

Pierre looked at him for a while until Alaric added:

"You are allowed to walk your dog when he needs it, within the time limit of an hour and in a radius of 1 km around the house. The park is 500 metres away and we are not going to spend the night there, and the moon comes out early at the moment , so we'll be fine."

"You thought about everything."

"I'm used to thinking about that kind of things."

"I'll come, unless it rains."

"OK, I'll go on my own in that case."

"And I'll wait for you with a towel to dry your wet paws."

They smiled at each other, and Alaric thought it had been a good idea for him to take the risk of revealing himself to Pierre.

Who was thinking something along the same lines, partly because spending a lock-down with someone could be a lot more pleasant – providing one got on well with the other – and that a park 500 metres away was really nice.  
Speaking of which...

“I’d love to go out for a walk and get some fresh air, you’re coming?”

“Yes, I need it too. Dressed, I get to use my daily authorised walk.”

## II. Mrs Watson's delicious mince pies

Jeanine Watson had now known her eccentric neighbour Aladaran for nine months. They had shared many walks, cakes and conversations.

Jeanine loved talking about her childhood and life, whilst Aladaran was more reserved.

When she had told him about her experience of the second world war, she had been one of the children sent away to the countryside, he had seemed to know the topic well, which was surprising considering he didn't even look forty, or just about.

Jeanine thought he must have studied it so well that it gave him the impression that he had lived it.

Aladaran had in fact experienced that war in his childhood as well, even if it had affected him differently, but he couldn't explain to her how faes had been affected.

It was one of the rare subjects concerning his childhood he had talked a bit about.

They had also discussed music, which is a totally safe topic when one wants to hide their age as long as one doesn't mention having been to a concert that had happened around sixty years ago.

Aladaran had stopped himself right on time and had corrected himself by talking about having seen a video, whilst hoping Jeanine wouldn't know whether this concert had been filmed or not.

Christmas was getting closer so Jeanine had brought up the topic of holidays with the family.

"I hope we will be finally able to go out and see people. I intend to spend Christmas with my family!" She had announced during their latest walk.

She wasn't complaining about the situation, she understood the need for those restrictions, but Aladaran knew she missed her family.

Luckily, she could see them during video calls regularly.

"How do you celebrate them, usually?"

Jeanine had come alive and Aladaran had guessed she was going to talk about her favourite activity.

"First, we decorate the house. And the garden, of course. But in a delicate way, not with those bright red and flashing lights. I like what's natural: wood, paper, cloth... I have some decorations that are sixty or more years old, in clay, very pretty. Angels, painted by hand. We can't find that sort of things much these days, it's a shame. Everyone prefers plastic but you can't compare them. Clay lasts, and it has a different feel. And then, I cook."

Her eyes shone brighter, then.

"You know I love cooking. Christmas is a time to really show my talent. The kitchen, which is already my domain, is forbidden to all unless someone wants to peel vegetables or do some washing up. I don't mind delegating this, but I do everything else. Cooking vegetables and meat, food presentation... I really enjoy it. My daughters didn't use to understand, they had the feeling I was doing it because I felt I had to fit into a certain role. Then we talked about, and I explained to them that I love cooking. You have to pay attention, know what you want to do before hand but be able to adapt to what's happening, and feeding people is a way to show we love them and to take care of them."

She smiled.

“Of course, I wouldn’t want to do Christmas meals everyday, but once a year I enjoy the challenge!”

Aldaran, who had no difficulties picturing Jeanine barring the access to the kitchen to the rest of the family, was a bit concerned.

“Are you sure it’s reasonable to do it all alone?”

“You remind me of my daughters, they say the same. Maybe I’ll delegate a bit more this year, but they don’t know how to do all this. It’s not that they are bad cooks or that I think they wouldn’t be capable of doing it, but I’m not sure they are very interested in it. It requires a lot of time and work, and they don’t necessarily have it. I start to think about the menu two month earlier, to be sure I can find something that suits everyone – between those who don’t eat meat, those who don’t eat fish, those who want this dessert or that one... Then there is the shopping, you have to choose well the ingredients, and then the preparation – I start a few days earlier. I am retired, I can, but when you work, it’s harder.”

“You remind me of my mother. She starts asking us what we want for Christmas in September. I am not at all in the Christmas spirit by that point, so I always answer something slightly out of topic. One year, she decided to follow what my brother and I had said and made us a rice salad, like the one we eat when we go for a pic-nick on the seaside. It was a change from the traditional roast!”

Jeanine laughed heartily.

“She could have made you some BLT sandwiches!”

“Note that we wouldn’t have minded either. What’s important for us is to be together. My mother used to stress out a bit about those meals, but lately she has relaxed a lot. I will suggest the sandwiches, she might find the suggestion interesting.”

“And does she make mince pies?”

“No, that’s not part of our traditions.”

“How many are you?” asked Jeanine with a twinkle in her eyes.

“It changes a lot, depending on who’s in the area and if friends come over. I see where you are going with this, you’re not going to make pies for all of us, are you?”

“If I make ten of them, will it be ok? Just so you can try them. And if you like them, I might consider giving you the recipe. If you promise not to share it on the internet. It’s a family recipe, after all.”

“That’s really nice of you! Does it exist for vegetarians? There are some in the family.”

“Ten of each, then.” She thought for a while. “And if we can’t meet up for Christmas, we can always freeze it all and do Christmas in July. It’ll be a change from sandwiches and rice salads!”

*[BLT: bacon lettuce tomato, a classic sandwich.]*

*Mince pies can sometimes be made with suet, hence the “vegetarian” option.]*

### III. The gnome of the retirement home

Georges was looking at the garden through the window of the lounge when he saw movement outside. It wasn't a squirrel, it didn't have the fluffy tail, and it wasn't a bird.

Georges, being a curious man and needing some fresh air – why do they have to turn the heating on so high? – made his way to one of the doors leading to the garden.

On his way, he came across Beth, the kind nurse – not like some...

“You're going out, mister Dubois?”

“Yes, it's too hot here, and I need a change of scenery, if you see what I mean.”

“Yes, I see exactly what you mean!” replied Beth laughingly.

Mister Dubois might need more help than he would have being able to get at home, he was part of those seniors who were bored in retirement homes. The [personnel] did what they could to find activities and entertainments, but between the fact that they needed to find something that suited everyone and the lack of means – both financial and [human?] – the offers were limited.

Beth called after him:

“You should put a coat on, it's cold and the difference in temperatures won't be good for you.”

Georges waved her advice off.

“I won't be long, I just want to look at something closer.”

And on those words, he went outside.

He didn't need to go around the building and back in front of the main room since the strange animal had come to him, which he appreciated considering he didn't want to make a show out of himself, nor spend too long outside. Beth was right, it was freezing.

The animal was perched on a branch. Georges wouldn't have been able to tell what tree it was, just that it didn't grow high enough to make some shade. The flowers, however, were pretty and brightened the garden in the Spring.

“What are you?” Said Georges, slowly moving closer.

The animal didn't move.

“What? I'm loosing my mind!”

Georges had in front of him what seemed to be a gnome: a small humanoid of around 15 centimetres (around 6 inches) high, dressed in browns and dark greens. He would have been well camouflaged if it hadn't been for his bright green pointed hat, that contrasted against the dark leaves.

The little creature spoke loud enough that Georges – slightly hard of hearing – heard him, strangely.

“Hello mister Dubois! I am very happy that you saw me! I am Tom, the gnome of the retirement home.”

“I’m sure I’m loosing my marbles, but at least it’s entertaining. Alright, Tom, I’ll pretend I believe you are real. And call me Georges!”

Tom told him he’d been living here for 70 years. He He moved here because he had wanted to bring some joy to people here, who seemed very lonely. He was still single but was hoping to meet a gnome with whom getting married and having twins – like in every gnomish family. It wasn’t very varied, but at least one can prepare for it. This said, nowadays, with how humans mess with nature, it could change.

Georges came back inside eventually, half-convinced he was loosing his mind and half- happy to have met a new friend. Tom was very learned and had a lot of stories to tell, which forshadowed long and interesting conversations.

He thought about telling Pierre, his grandson, when they’ll call each other on video – Pierre had gifted him a smartphone to allow themselves to talk and see each other during the pandemic – but he thought he might worry him.

Or maybe not. Georges had always been the family’s eccentric. He could always pretend he had started to write to pass the time.

Actually, he might just do that. Writing that story would be entertaining for him, and maybe for others.

He was going to have to ask Pierre for a notebook and a pen.

#### IV. Family meeting – on video

Pierre called his grand-father regularly to avoid him feeling lonely. He hadn't been much to visit him despite the possibilities, to avoid taking any risks and to leave the space for others who needed it. Georges seemed to be ok with calls – “As long as we talk, I'm fine” – and found video calls really nice. Pierre called him sometimes from the park for a change of scenery.

Today, however, Alaric and himself were calling from the comfort of their lounge.

“Pierre, Alaric, let me introduce you someone!”

Pierre thought his grand-father might be in love, although it would be surprising. Georges had deeply loved his late wife, and had always said he wasn't interested at all in meeting someone else. His memories were enough for him.

“Tom, come here. Boys, this is Tom.”

Pierre nearly fell off the sofa.

“It's... You're a gnome !?!” He turned around to Alaric “You never told me it... They exist!”

“How did you want him to tell you? No one knows.” Commented Georges.

“Your story was true?”

“It was indeed!” Said Georges, looking proud of himself.

“Actually, I knew it, but I thought it wasn't up to me to reveal their existence. I've talked to you about a lot of things, but not everything as some creatures are even more secretive than others and out of respect for them I prefer not to say anything. Gnomes are amongst them.” Alaric finally explained. Then, turning to the screen “ Hello, Tom, how are you?”

Tom nodded to him “I am doing well, and yourself? I see our human friends are related, there must be something about them that make them more attractive to us, I suppose.”  
He laughed.

Georges came back in the conversation.

“What do you mean by “us”? Do you have something to tell me, boys?”

Pierre and Alaric looked at each other.

“Erm... Well...” Started Pierre, before Alaric cut him short.

“What has Tom explained to you, first?”

“Not much, really. He's talked to me a lot about himself, gnomes and nature, and we talk about history as well. It's very interesting, he knows a lot about humans.” Then, in a slightly impatient tone of voice, “Are you going to explain?”

Alaric smiled. He really liked that grand-father.

“I think it’s better if I show you.” Said he, whilst taking off his clothes.

“You’ve got wings under them?” Joked Georges.

Alaric didn’t reply, or not verbally anyway.

Georges exclaimed “Blimey! Do you have other news like that?”

Then, to Pierre, laughing: “Does he loose much hairs?”

Pierre was relieved, and not very surprised. His grand-father had always been a bit eccentric, and clearly he had kept an open mind.

## *The ones out of lock-down celebrate Christmas*

Aldaran celebrated the solstice “in the world beyond the shadows” with his family and friends. His brother Arhon was there and had brought his friend Henry, with whom he would go to celebrate Christmas, his parents had gotten into the habit of celebrating human traditions. The friend John, a bear - almost literally, and his family were there, with three adorable bear cubs who wolfed down the mince pies. Luckily, Aldaran’s mother had anticipated and managed to save most of them, which everyone appreciated.

Aldaran was going to have to ask Mrs Watson for her recipe.

As for the dinner, it consisted in salmon, a nut roast for the vegetarians and a mix of vegetables and chestnut, not forgetting the starters and two magnificent Yule logs – it wasn’t too much, considering the amount of people loving dessert around the table.

At Alaric and Pierre’s, the dinner of the 24<sup>th</sup> was an “apéritif dinatoire” (an aperitif which is like a meal) in front of a Christmas film. For once, Alaric hadn’t joined his family, preferring doing it with Pierre, and George who joined them on the 25<sup>th</sup> with Tom for a turkey with chestnuts, cooked by Alaric following his mother’s recipe.

The day had started with hot chocolate and freshly baked croissants from the bakery down the street and the opening of presents, because it’s better in pyjamas. And also because they were both kids who were as looking forward to opening their presents as they were of seeing the other one opening his.

Mrs Watson had the joy of seeing her family, and even allowed her daughters – and sons-in-law – to help her, resulting in her re-localisation in an armchair in the lounge where she could listen to her grandchildren telling her all about their lock-downs and what Father Christmas – or rather, their parents – had brought them, and from where she could answer to the questions from the team in the kitchen. They had to reassure her regularly that everything was going well, which she noticed upon seeing the results: it was as good as if she had done it herself, and a lot less tiring – but much less amusing.

Her main room being big enough, the children ate on the table in the lounge and the adults spread out on the dining table, to keep space between them.

They had all been tested before hand, had quarantined themselves before the test to not take any risk, and hadn’t hugged, much to Mrs Watson’s sadness who loved to hug her grandchildren who seemed to enjoy it as much – even if the teenagers grumbled, to keep up appearances.