

## **AFTER THE WAY BACK**

by Mary Jane Walsh

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**KEEPING POSITIVE:** Spend as much time as possible outdoors.  
**YES.** You can publish this!

*A bit of Peter Allen's When Everything Old Is New Again is heard in the background during the reading of the CHARACTERS through "At rise," and then it fades out.*

## **CHARACTERS**

DOC. A 70-year old bare-chested man, wears riding jodhpurs, yellow crocks and a floppy, brimmed hat.

NANA. A 14-year old girl, is a curious artiste attired as such in wispy chiffon tutu and flack jacket.

JASTI. A 17-year old boy, the scientific sort in tattered white lab coat and jeans.

LULULU. A 55-year old woman in a colorful full blouse and tight yoga pants

## **TIME**

Spring 2050

Thirty years have passed since the world began suffering from the Covid-19 disease for which a vaccine has not yet been found. The Greatest Depression III has left its ugly scars on those who have survived the disease and still can scrape out a living. The Martian Wars of 2035 and 2036 have been forgotten. The livable areas of the world's continents are similar. People wander wherever they wish, usually in and around places they used to live.

## **PLACE**

The deteriorated facade of a cheap, ornate mansion built around 2020 in a western New Jersey field.

*At rise, DOC wields a sledge hammer to wedge new supports under the front porch which sags dangerously to the ground at one end. NANA crawls out from under the other end.*

NANA

Guess what, Doc! Jasti's pet rat Devil you hated so much didn't run away! It died under the porch.

*NANA holds up a dead rat with a rat trap dangling from a rear paw.*

Caught in a trap! Still kinda smells, poor thing.

DOC

Get it away from me, Nana! Rats are devilish trouble! We never should have let Jasti keep it. Especially with that name! Throw it on the back heap. I'll burn the whole mess tonight.

NANA

*As she exits dragging the rat, she points to a red plastic milk crate.*

I found more good stuff too! Check out my box.

*DOC takes a cursory look at the milk crate and goes back to hammering. LULULU and JASTI enter.*

JASTI

You should've come with us, Doc. We found a new pit! Look what I got!

*He holds up a dented old trumpet.*

A thing you can blow. But it's stuck. Lululu says you can fix it. And there's a bigger blower thing too! Too big to carry!

DOC

Yep. I know about blower things, big and small. That's called a trumpet. I wonder how that ever survived. Trumpets were banned for a while in The Way Back.

JASTI

What do you mean, "banned?"

LULULU

Don't get into history now, Doc! I haven't been as excited about a new pit since we found Truck Tire Tunnel. Today's pit has too much for us to carry. Best of all, there was nobody around as far as we could see!

DOC

How'd we miss it before?

LULULU

Lots of scrubby bushes and vines grow in the silt right on the tarp that covers it. We got to hurry back! Let's drag the truck bed over there and load up. I'll get our harnesses.

DOC

I'm set on leveling the porch today so we can use the front door. And I'm gonna lay down a nice piece of plywood I found in the old gym. I'm making a dance floor for Nana. She soldered some tin can lids to those tie-up shoes you found her and has been begging me . . .

LULULU

Doc! I'm talking real business! Not show business! Barter business! Plastic patio furniture like you won't believe. You've got the melter in tip-top condition now. I can melt hundreds of patio chairs down to quarter-inch sheets and 4-by-4 tiles. I can make pipes, even a couple of snap-together kayaks to sell at the next fair!

DOC

That won't be for a long while yet. We should focus on our food crops. And cash is tight.

LULULU

I don't care. I want that plastic now! What if somebody saw us there?

JASTI

Look at this! It's real paper!

*He holds up a little booklet and reads:*

"How To Prepare Your Home for New Internet Service from Loon." Before I blew over here, the people I was with talked about Loon. They said it was magic from early in The Way Back.

LULULU

Loon *is* from The Way Back, Jasti. But it was real, not magic. The Alphabet people tried to give everybody in the whole world access to all the information in the world. So they —

DOC

— They strung silky white, gigantic balloons up in the nanosphere to transmit signals to every intelligent phone on earth. Didn't matter if the person listening to that phone was intelligent or not. Everyone got all the same information no matter what language, where they lived or—

*NANA enters and interrupts.*

NANA

—Got bad news for you, Jasti. Devil's dead! I found him under the porch and—

DOC

'Nuff said about that, Nana! Sorry for your loss, Jasti.

JASTI

What happened?

NANA

It looked like he —

DOC

— We'll find you a pet or something on our way to the new pit tomorrow.

LULULU

Not tomorrow! Now! In addition to the virgin plastic there's a heap of equipment you'd kill for — not really, of course — but I'm talking heavy rope, tackle, sandbags, two-by-fours — I cried when I saw it. The memories! Everything usable — and marketable. I'm telling you, Doc, we have to go now!

JASTI

Lulu's right! I want to get more written things on real paper. I know how to read plenty good enough. My first people showed me. I'll find out about the panda den disease —

LULULU

— Huh? —

JASTI

—the disease — you know, the disease nobody talks about: panda . . . panda medic . . . whatever . . . And I'll find out about the wind — why everybody keeps getting tossed around by the Weehawken Wind, and why nobody sticks with anybody else, and—

DOC

Enough! I'll get our harnesses.

LULULU

Be right back. Gotta brush out my hair and find my lipstick.  
*She exits.*

NANA

I hate my harness. It's heavy.

JASTI

Such a whiner!

DOC

You just have to help pull on the way over, Nana. The truck will be empty. I'll rig up a set of wheels for you to drag something light on the way back.

NANA

Yeah, but I already did a lot of work today. You didn't even look at what I got dug up! I found pictures of—

JASTI

Stupid pictures on real paper packets — those colored things sticking up from dirt? The real paper's more important than—

NANA

—No! Not pictures of what were called flowers. Pictures of round things and bags of the real round things themselves, like buttons with a big cut out letter “B” that's—

*LULULU enters looking glamorous*

LULULU

Let's go! Help me with my harness, Doc!

*Lights change as all exit.*

*Lights rise on all now returned and gathered around the front porch. They are dusty, dirty, sweaty and /or tired.*

DOC

Phew! It was worth the trek, Lululu. You were right. We hit pay dirt. I'm beat, but before I stop I'm going to flip that plywood over right on the ground so Nana can have her practice floor! . . . . There you go, Miss Tin Can Alley!

NANA

Don't know what you mean, but thanks, Doc!

JASTI

I saw you, Doc, how you and Lululu got all mushy and crying when you found all those fancy clothes and hats. What good are they?

NANA

You don't know anything, Jasti. I blew in here way before you, and I know a lot more about Lululu and Doc than you'll ever know. I had only one set of people before them.

JASTI

You could get blown somewhere else if it's discovered there's an illegal family-like situation here. So, what do you know that I don't know?

NANA

I know it's a secret they want to keep, but —

LULULU

—Hold on there, dearie. Secrets are secrets for a reason.

NANA

You and Doc are brother and sister!

LULULU

No gold star for you, Nana! You're close, because our secret had to be kept in the beginning of The Way Back. That's when the anti-family laws were passed. Doc and I already were married. Right before the No Theatre laws were passed.

JASTI

Never heard of that.

LULULU

There's so much you'll never know. You and Nana are too young.

DOC

There we were on Broadway in *All That Jazz* and madly in love! We decided to marry on the spot. We've been traveling the trails ever since, surviving the best we can. Trying to help out whoever gets blown our way.

NANA

Wow! A secret inside a secret!

DOC

It's a crazy world, right Jasti?

JASTI

Uh, yeah, it's crazy and hard to figure out what's real and what isn't. That's why I like things on real paper. Even if I can't read it all, if it's on paper, I think it's closer to what might be true.

DOC

We'll talk about getting you up to speed on reading later. Meanwhile . . .

NANA

Meanwhile — look at the stuff I found under the porch! Please look!

*She shows pages of information and pictures of Bitcoin and starts to read:*

“Bitcoin, the top crypto-currency by market value has dropped 20 percent the past six weeks, but traders expect value to increase throughout the first quarter of 2020.”

So far, I've dug up 75 bags of these buttons — er, coins — So maybe we don't have to worry too much about money for a while!

LULULU

You never know, Nana! Doc, let's do something we haven't tried in decades, and then we'll teach these youngsters. Lyrics first:

When trumpets were mellow  
And every gal only had one fellow  
No need to remember when  
'Cause everything old is new again.

And now we'll give it a try singing!

NANA

Wait till I get my dancing shoes on!

JASTI

I don't have dancing shoes. My boots will have to do.

DOC

I've still got my soft shoe savoir faire! But I'll ditch the crocks.

LULULU

And a one, and a two and . . .

ALL

When trumpets were mellow

*The four of them take the dance break on the new plywood floor.*

*Fade out to the sound of tap dancing to Everything Old is New Again.  
Can be seen on YouTube.*

