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### Kreplach Kayos Covid

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# Kreplach Kayos Covid

## A Short Story by Marleen S. Barr

Professor Sondra Lear, a feminist science fiction scholar par excellence, no longer loved living in the Empire State Building's shadow. Although Sondra thought that science fiction texts were nice respectable places to visit, she absolutely did not want to live in one. She wished that the Empire State could strike back faster against the corona virus. Quarantining in a city reduced to a mere shadow of its former self was wearing thin. Perusing the *New York Times* and listening to Governor Cuomo's press briefings now qualified as being a full day's work. When Cuomo ended his remarks by as usual mentioning "New York toughness," Sondra began to nap on her sofa. The sound of something going bump in the afternoon roused her from her boredom-induced torpor. She half-heartedly opened one eye and gazed directly at a familiar figure floating below her ceiling fan. Upon immediately recognizing the dark-suited man hovering above, she stared at him with two eyes wide open. Even though she was a science fiction scholar and, hence, used to the unreal, Sondra failed to believe that Governor Cuomo could at once be sitting at his briefing and levitating in her apartment. Now, fully awake, she realized that she was looking at the father, not the son—at Mario, not Andrew.

"Governor Cuomo, why are you in my apartment defying gravity?" Sondra inquired. "First of all, as you are aware, I'm dead. What did you expect me to do? Have your doorman announce that I am on my way up? Besides no formality is needed. We've met before."

"I know. I walked up to you at an event and blurted out that I admired your political acumen and erudition. You said 'My son Andrew is better.' Although I don't think that Andrew is more articulate than you, I am kissing the ground that he is the governor. I still want to know why you have sought me out in a supernatural form."

"I remember you mentioning that you are a science fiction scholar and I had never before met one. Since I am now desperately seeking someone of your professional ilk, well, here I am. People who have not dedicated their lives to contemplating extraterrestrials and flying saucers do not meet my immediate need. For example, I contacted my son Chris. He clearly saw me and, like any reasonable person, attributed my presence to a covid fever induced delusion. As soon as I realized that my own son failed to believe in my presence, I knew that you were my only hope."

"I am honored that you remember me and I agree that science fiction scholars do not grow on trees. But what can I do for you?"

"I love New York. The suffering that the virus is causing my fellow New Yorkers is breaking my heart. I have come back from the dead because I know how to flip the switch which will get

everything back to normal. But, because I am a ghost, I can't do it. You, Professor Lear, are elected."

"New York is as dead as you are. I would do anything to go back to 2019. What do I use? Time machines? Teleportation? Portals? Suspended animation? I know every science fiction trope in the book. I am sick of living in a science fiction scenario. I hate Zoom. I, like everyone else in the world, fervently wish to reinstate normal reality. I mean if you told me how to turn subways into spaceships I would do it. Just explain how to proceed and I'm in."

"That's the problem. I can't tell you exactly what to do. According to the prophecy I am communicating, you have to use your critical acumen to find the solution yourself."

Can you give me a hint?"

"Okay. The answer lies in the juxtaposition of authenticity and food."

"Do you mean food as medicine? I am in favor of natural rather than pharmaceutical cures."

"I am unable to say more. Just try your best, Sondra. You had the chutzpah to come right up to me and speak your mind. You can do this."

Sondra, doubting that she had the power and ability to save New York alone, decided to call in a crisis management expert. She immediately recognized that Andrew was the best person to help her to fulfill the prophecy Mario described. At first daunted by having to get the attention of the governor of New York, she decided to turn to the tried and true method. She typed a message into the contact section of his website. Her message read as follows. "Dear Governor Cuomo: I know that you are exceedingly busy and I hate to bother you. But I have a problem. Yes, many New Yorkers now have problems. But my particular quandary is directly pertinent to you. I will cut to the chase. Your father is currently floating around in my apartment. Before you send state troopers to come to get me because you think that I am a meshugganah science fiction scholar gone rogue, I have enclosed a picture of your father positioned next to my ceiling fan. By the way, he says that he has come back from the dead to deputize me to run the corona virus out of town. Oops. Wrong genre. My field is science fiction, not westerns—even though I received my Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo which, as you know, is located far far away from the city in the western part of the state. After you ordered everyone to wear face masks we all resembled bandits straight out of the old west. I'm using my words here, not paraphrasing your father's eloquence. I'm a little woozy from being housebound for so long. You have my email at the top of the form. Please contact me ASAP. I look forward to working with you to rid New York of what you so often call 'the beast.' Thank you for your attention."

Luckily, a feminist staffer read Sondra's message. Thinking that she had nothing to lose by believing in a fellow woman's credulity (especially a woman who had a Ph.D.), she brought the message to the governor's immediate attention. The stalker who so famously appeared on worldwide television during that many moons ago 1974 Academy Awards ceremony had nothing

on the staffer as she dashed in front of the governor's briefing dais and placed Sondra's text in his hands. He took one look at the picture of his floating father and believed in the veracity of Sondra's claims.

Sondra, thinking that Andrew would never get back to her and running out of things to say to Mario, rose from her sofa to answer her housephone.

"Hello, there's someone here to see you," said Carleton the doorman.

"Who?"

"Governor Cuomo. He says that he wants you to come down because he can't come up due to his social distancing requirements."

Sondra grabbed her facemask and put it on in the elevator. She then walked across the lobby and stood precisely six feet away from the governor. Knowing that she barely escaped incarceration for being a meshugganah contacting a governor, she did not want to press her luck by violating social distancing rules.

"I am happy to meet you, governor. When I had the pleasure of talking to the living version of your father, he told me that he thought that you are better than he is—or was. You're doing the best job that can be expected of anyone. Thank you. Since you're busy, I will get to the point. Your father says that the virus can be vanquished via combining food with authenticity."

"Well then let's eat," suggested the governor. "De Blasio has agreed to close down some streets to make more room for people. I will have a table which is big enough to seat us six feet apart set up on the newly car-free street in front of your building."

"Your father stipulated that the food has to be authentic."

"Done. I will call Grubhub and order up a true to my heritage Italian lunch. Should we do pizza or spaghetti and meatballs?"

"Either would be fine. But I think we need to go heavier on the authenticity. Italians like to eat in groups. Can we invite another Italian-American? There is one Italian-American New Yorker I would like to meet."

"Which one?"

"Dr. Anthony Fauci. I love Dr. Fauci."

Soon after Cuomo phoned in his Dr. Fauci request, the good doctor appeared at the big table faster than a New York minute and took his seat six feet apart from Sondra and the governor.

The three cordially conversed and twirled their spaghetti around their forks. At the conclusion of the uncommon repast it was clear that “the beast” was still raging through the city.

Sondra was devastated. “It didn’t work,” said Sondra to her fellow luncheoners while she hung her head.

“So true,” said Dr. Fauci. “But I enjoyed having a break from proclaiming that ingesting bleach is not a viable virus cure. Eating spaghetti and meatballs is more pleasant than warning people against eating bleach. Well, it was good to meet you. But I have to get back to doing the best I can to emphasize generating a scientific solution.”

“And I have to go to work too,” said the governor.

A crestfallen Sondra bid her fellow New Yorkers adieu and returned to her apartment. Mario Cuomo was nowhere to be seen. She opened her almost bare refrigerator and contemplated how she was going to prepare a meal which was even more authentic than the one she had just enjoyed. Since the city’s hordes were avoiding dangerous grocery stores and vying to get home delivery via the overburdened Instacart and websites of its ilk, food was hard to come by. Obtaining food, in fact, was all that New Yorkers could talk about. Sondra saw a note attached to her last container of milk. “Dear Sondra,” it read. “You need to think more authentic thoughts. Do not despair. Mario.”

Sondra, remembering that it was Passover, thought that preparing a Passover dinner might adhere to the prophecy’s authenticity requirement. But due to the food scarcity attributed to the virus, she certainly did not have matzoh and brisket. Even in normal times her matzoh balls, instead of being light and fluffy, sunk like lead balloons. Feeling pressured to listen to Mario and save New York City, she again tried to resort to science fiction. She had a brainstorm. She remembered that her great uncle was none other than the Horowitz associated with the iconic Jewish food purveyor most Baby Boomer New York Jews knew from, the Horowitz Margaretan Jewish food company. Abraham Horowitz was married to Sondra’s grandfather Sam’s sister Miriam. Sondra’s childhood Passover celebrations were always replete with the macaroons and egg matzoh which emanated from the cartons filled with food Horowitz always sent to his niece, Sondra’s mother Rozie.

Sondra reasoned that if Mario Cuomo had come back from the dead and materialized in her apartment maybe her great uncle would follow suit. So she gazed at the ceiling and launched into an incantation. “Uncle Abe. Hello? Are you up there? It’s me. Your grandniece, Sondra. I vividly remember you. I hope you remember me. I recall that even though you ran a famous Jewish food company you were not that religious. So maybe you won’t mind that this ghost thing is a little on the goyishe side. In any event, could you please send a carton filled with kosher for Passover food? I know that the internet and FreshDirect happened way after your time. But contactless

delivery is all the rage now. It is long story and I can't go into it but I need authentic Jewish food to save New York from 'the beast.' Please send some immediately if not sooner."

Nothing happened. No Uncle Abe appeared in Mario Cuomo's wake. Ditto for the much wished for direct delivery of a Horowitz Margareten food box. Because she was hungry, Sondra decided to prepare her Passover dinner by making do with what she had. Glad that she did not serve her remaining can of Chef Boyardee ravioli to Andrew Cuomo and Dr. Fauci, she opened the can and washed the sauce off the meat-stuffed dough. Deciding to give up on the matzoh balls, she defined the now naked ravioli as kreplach in disguise. No matter that kreplach is eaten on Rosh Hashanah and Purim, not Passover. Because Grandpa Sam married a reformed woman, Rozi did not teach Sondra to be a practicing Jew. So eat your heart out light and fluffy matzoh balls. Sondra then found the one old dried up chicken bouillon cube hiding out in the back of her kitchen cabinet. She boiled the cube, threw in the kreplach, and —voilà—she had created her own New York covid food scarcity version of matzoh ball soup.

Disregarding that the kreplach, as opposed to matzoh ball cooking dictums, was dense and heavy she began to eat the soup. Next year in back to normal New York she thought as she slurped.

And then it happened. The kreplach rose from the soup bowl and hung in the air. Sondra's apartment was soon inundated with kreplach to the extent that she could no longer move. Afraid that she would get in trouble with the coop board for being a kreplach hoarder, she opened her kitchen window. The kreplach floated out into the city. In a matter of days the city, state, country, and entire planet were inundated with kreplach. And then the corona virus disappeared from the face of the Earth. Dr. Fauci explained that kreplach was the magic bullet, that kreplach had the ability to eat the corona virus. This science-based national treasure reality community denizen had trouble getting his head around what had ensued. Sondra's creative authenticity in terms of food had reified Mario Cuomo's prophecy. The defeat of the beast was as miraculous as the oil lamp which burned on Hanukkah.

In response to hearing that she had saved the world, Sondra triumphantly took her face mask in hand, turned on the stove, and set fire to it. Floating amidst the smoke, Sondra saw a giant bleached blonde bouffant hair styled head.

"Sondra, it's me, Rozie, your mother," screamed the head. "What were you doing trying to resurrect my Uncle Abe instead of me? Why didn't you think of me? I'm your mother. You have no respect. And what's with the substituting the required light fluffy matzoh balls with the fake crappy kreplach? How do you expect to get married if you refuse to make proper matzoh balls? Get married Sondra."

Sondra, exulting in her new ability to get back to her normal New York life, walked out the door to attend the most crowded feminist literary theory event she could find. She hoped that when she returned Rozie would follow the example of both Mario and the virus and disappear. Contemplating the possibility that Rozie could haunt her forever, she articulated the following response: "Oy gevalt."

Marleen S. Barr is known for her pioneering work in feminist science fiction and teaches English at the City University of New York. She has won the Science Fiction Research Association Pilgrim Award for lifetime achievement in science fiction criticism. Barr is the author of *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*, and *Genre Fission: A New Discourse Practice for Cultural Studies*. Barr has edited many anthologies and co-edited the science fiction issue of *PMLA*. She has published the novels *Oy Pioneer!* and *Oy Feminist Planets: A Fake Memoir*. Her *When Trump Changed: The Feminist Science Fiction Justice League Quashes the Orange Outrage Pussy Grabber* is the first single-authored Trump short story collection.