

## The Quarantine friend

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On a call to a friend in Czech Republic, she described him as being 30 but dressing like 80 and eating like 12: he didn't like olives, tomatoes, coffee. Her friend bursted into laughter but then the Skype connection got lost.

The cute woman from Tinder didn't call back after their social distant date at the riverbank; he insisted. She saved his number as Fritz – Quarantine Friend. It was four weeks into lockdown and she had barely left her flat. It'd be good to see some people, she was desperately trying to reason with herself. Social media were circling sarcastic script ideas for social distant filmmaking, for her it wasn't memes; it was her bitter reality to come.

They had scheduled a co-working session in her small one bedroom apartment. She just managed to change from her pyjamas in time before he rang her doorbell at 9.59. A bottle of Fanta in one hand, a bag of extra large chips in the other one, his body had almost filled the door frame. He stood there so excited. She moved away just in time to avoid the hug. "We should keep our distance", she smiled apologetically. When he sat down on her couch, the fluffy soft part of the sofa was close to touching the ground. He offered to read her application and gave several helpful tips. When she proposed they'd get some take-away pizza, he jumped out of the sofa and followed her out of the door.

On the way there they checked the news, the Berlin senate had prolonged the lockdown for two weeks more. She shrugged her shoulders.

After lunch, she slipped under her sheets to read a book. In the reflection of her glasses, she saw that he lied down next to her. He placed his hand on her shoulder. It felt like a child touching their mother. Slightly disgusted, she pushed herself more to the edge of the bed. His sausage-shaped fingers, he took her glasses and cleaned them with his shirt. He pressed them back on her face.

His palm was thick, salmoned-colored and suddenly felt good on her face. The sensations in her body read ambiguously. She clearly didn't want to do this but her body was telling her something else. It was the first time in weeks she was with someone in a room for longer than it takes to buy groceries in a supermarket. Is there a low bar for touch? Is bad touch better than no touch?

Suddenly, it was four hours later and she missed her zoom yoga class, the only regular item on her agenda. They finished the bag of chips and watched tv shows arm in arm.

In the morning, she woke up feeling very itchy all over her body, as if the blanket couldn't protect her anymore. She jumped out of the bed, swiftly put on her running shoes, jogging being one of the few allowed activities. She did her regular rounds around the river but her anxiety didn't drop. The metal music in her ears only intensified it.

When she returned, she found him sitting there half-naked wrapped in her fluffiest towel, his hair in a turban.

“I made you breakfast”, he smiled and his smile reminded her of her 12 year old brother.

A lukewarm pancake landed on her plate. A flour was all over the floor and she saw that he used up the gluten free flour she bought for her friend’s birthday cake. How many supermarkets will she have to visit to find it again? How long will the queues be?

She sat down and tried to focus on her plate. The discomfort grew stronger. She excused herself under the shower, her feet marking traces in the snow-like floor, and let the water run down.

A loud fart from the toilet. “There’s no hot water”, he shouted from the other side of the bathroom. The shower must have been cold for a while now; her fingers turned blue, her upper lip shivered. She carefully dried herself with the tiny hand towel that was left.

She felt a strange mix of relief and sadness when she packed his stuff and he finally left the house.