

Love in the Time of Coronavirus

By

Ivo de Jager

dejagerivo@gmail.com
ivos.space
07740328224

Cast of Characters

Walt:

49, bitter queen with
survivor's guilt who toils
in the mines of academia.

Jez:

32, actor, gay hatchling but
a keen learner.

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

A sharply decorated living room in a hip London flat.

WALT lies on the sofa, reading a book.

JEZ has just returned from the shops with two big opaque carrier bags and a trolley bag. He sets the shopping down.

JEZ

Right, we're all set! For the next couple weeks at least.

WALT

Who knew the apocalypse would only last a couple of weeks.

JEZ

(dismissive)

Yeah, yeah. You gonna give me a hand?

WALT

Oh, I would. I'd love to. But my injury.

JEZ

The muscle you pulled in your hot yoga class?

JEZ crouches. Between sentences, or while WALT is speaking, he'll occasionally remove a toilet paper roll from one of the bags.

WALT

My *normal* yoga class. Just because the heating's out of whack doesn't suddenly make it "hot yoga."

JEZ

Well, it's hot, innit, and it's yoga.

WALT

Faced with implacable logic, the wise man can only bow his head.

JEZ

How 'bout you bow down here so we can sort this out quick?

WALT

But my injury.

JEZ rolls his eyes and keeps unpacking.

WALT

You really could stand to be more grateful, you know. I do it for you.

JEZ

How's your yoga class do anything for me?

WALT

If you want to keep twisting me like a fucking pretzel whenever we get into bed, I have to be limber or my poor old bones won't last the season.

JEZ

Come on, /

WALT

Should be subsidizing me, if anything.

JEZ

you were doing yoga before we ever slept together.

WALT

All in hopes of some bright young thing sweeping me off my feet before my body totally collapsed. And/

WALT gestures toward JEZ.

JEZ

Christ, /

WALT

it worked, didn't it!

JEZ

the way you carry on, it's like you're my dad or something.

WALT

(mock outrage)

Jeremy! Not until our next roleplay.

JEZ

Jez.

WALT

Yeah, but that's not a person name.

JEZ

You're not some -- old codger. You're not even fifty!

WALT puts his book down and regards JEZ.

WALT

How old are you?

JEZ

What? Thirty-two. You know that.

WALT

That's gay middle age, darling. I'm positively Methuselah.

JEZ

Methuselah?

WALT

You said you'd been to Catholic school! It was one of your most attractive features. If you lied, I shall be very cross.

JEZ

I know who *Methuselah* is, *o ye of little faith*. I'm talking about your attitude!

WALT

I'll do ten Hail Marys.

JEZ

Walt! You're always saying queers have an "unhealthy fixation" with like, young guys, hench guys, but then you're forever joking that you're past it or look *bad* or something. It's not nice.

WALT

I never said I was particularly healthy. Or nice.

JEZ

Well, I'm saying it. You're fine and the way you put yourself down is bullshit.

WALT

I'm touched.

JEZ

You're fine even with your *sarcasm*. I'm not trying to make you feel better or whatever. I want the... *mindset* to change. I'm thirty-two, as you kindly pointed out. I'm on borrowed time.

WALT

Are you saying we won't be together forever?

JEZ shoots him a withering look.

WALT

Well, we've got plenty of time to find the solution to the Homosexual Question while we're cooped up in here.

He finally notices that JEZ has only unpacked toilet paper so-far.

WALT

Darling?

JEZ

Yeah?

WALT

Sweetheart. Sugarchops. Honeysuckle. Do you think we might need something other than bog roll? Food, perhaps?

JEZ

We've got food. Check the freezer.

WALT

Hm. I know you're sore about the gym closing, but I didn't realise you'd decided to undertake a regimen that requires continuous shitting for the next month. If that's not your plan, I'd question the need for...

(he counts)

thirty? thousand? rolls of toilet paper?

JEZ

Look, I panicked.

WALT

Trolley's more of the same, I imagine.

JEZ

(quickly)

No.

WALT pushes the trolley over with his foot. It's full of bottles of hand sanitizer.

JEZ

It's not toilet roll.

WALT

No. It's hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based?

JEZ reads the label on one of the bottles.

JEZ

Yeah.

WALT
Ugh. Dries out your skin. Makes you look old. Still, I suppose we can drink it if we run out of plonk.

JEZ
Worse ways of spending quarantine than totally fucking wankered, eh?

WALT
As we're lucky enough to be able to *afford* quarantine...

JEZ
Yeah. Reckon it'll pick back up when all this has settled down?

WALT
No, I think the London theatre scene will perish over the next two weeks.

JEZ
Two weeks? Now who's optimistic?

WALT
I'm a light in the darkness.

JEZ
I'll have to become your kept boy.

WALT
Become?

JEZ cuddles up to WALT.

JEZ
At least you corrupted me before the virus kicked off.

WALT
Hmm.

JEZ
Led me astray.

WALT
Kitten, you're an *act-or*. You were never on course to begin with.

JEZ laughs.

WALT goes back to his book.

Then:

JEZ

Are you worried?

WALT

Because I'm in the danger zone?

JEZ

You're *not* an old codger. I mean 'cause you've. You've seen how the government can be. With diseases, like.

WALT

JEZ

Like, not caring, not/ doing

WALT

This is nothing like HIV, Jeremy.

JEZ

We don't know that.

WALT

We *do* know that.

JEZ

But I've -- I read about it, in *your* book, about like, early on, how people weren't worried 'cause they thought it was all fake or an over/reaction

WALT

It's affecting *normal* people. Polite society. Nice straight nans and granddads who've had nice straight kids who've had nicer, straighter kids. Even Tory Britain won't just let them die,/ think of the optics

JEZ

They were going to, though! All that shit about controlled spread --

WALT

And we threw a collective fit, and they're changing their policy. You can't blame them for trying. In the 80s, controlled spread was a huge success. Not a peep -- not from anyone that mattered, until Our Lady Di stepped in.

WALT crosses himself when he mentions Diana.

WALT

Culled the undesirables like a charm.

JEZ

But you're still here.

WALT

But I'm still here.

Pause.

WALT

Do you know why it's called "coronavirus?"

JEZ

Huh? Uh, the shape, right?

WALT

From the ancient Greek for garland, *korone*. Isn't that a nice image? I think it looks more like a chestnut, or a sea-mine. Google it.

JEZ does.

JEZ

Oh yeah. Looks like a little creature. Which it is, I guess, kind of.

WALT

Well, you've been badgering me about getting a pet, there you go. Free of charge.

JEZ

I'll pass.

WALT

Not to me, I hope.

JEZ

Haaaah.

WALT

Look up what the AIDS virus is like, too.

JEZ does.

JEZ

It looks the same.

WALT

Aw. It's the inside that counts. Doesn't that teach us a valuable lesson?

JEZ

That's where they keep all the nasty stuff, yeah? The proper, like, virusy bit. Inside.

WALT

I suppose it's where we all keep the nasty stuff.

JEZ

Don't make fun. I'm trying to/ understand

WALT

I know. And I'm waffling.

JEZ

Well, you're a teacher.

WALT

Professor, thank you.

Pause.

WALT

When you put the viruses side by side, they look the same. But they are different. Coronavirus is being dealt with from the start, and that'll save thousands of lives. That's by design. The awareness campaigns, the social isolation, staying home from work. When AIDS ripped through a generation, that was by design, too. Almost as meticulous. Awareness campaigns -- not awareness of the disease, of how to avoid it, but of the queers finally getting their due. Social isolation -- even in hospitals -- whole wards cordoned off for the sake of the healthy, the doctors and nurses who were kind enough to let us pollute their institutions. Good luck finding a funeral home. If we bury them, they'll leech into the water supply, won't they? Cremation en masse -- but then, what if we breathe it in? Will it spread through my lungs like it did *his* blood? You don't know, Jez. They put him in a fucking bin bag --

WALT stops. He breathes.

WALT

Staying home from work. Because you couldn't work. Because the Kaposi's stigmata outed you if you hadn't been outed already. And then, when winter came, your landlord switched off the heat so you'd just hurry up and shuffle off and free up prime real estate -- because, of course, the gay districts were coming back in style. So no. This is nothing like HIV. Because where Mistress Corona is concerned, we're treating the disease. Where HIV is concerned, we are the disease. And the virus is the exterminating angel.

JEZ
Who's he?

WALT
He?

JEZ
Who did they put in a bin bag?

WALT laughs humourlessly.

WALT
My inside source.

JEZ
Your boyfriend.

WALT

JEZ
Your first?

WALT

JEZ
You were a kid.

WALT
And I survived.

JEZ takes WALT's hand.

WALT
Are you going to propose?

JEZ
You didn't *survive*, babe. You lived. I'll be here.
Living, with you. Even if it gets bad out there.

WALT
You can't promise that.

JEZ
Wanna bet?

WALT kisses JEZ on the forehead.

WALT
What *do* we have in the freezer, then.

JEZ
Chicken and veg, I think.

WALT
Write us a proper list. We'll go back out together and do an actual shop.

JEZ
I can go if you're/ worried

WALT
I thought I wasn't an old codger?

JEZ gestures like, "fair." He stands up to check on what's in the kitchen.

WALT smacks him on the bum as he goes.

JEZ
Oi!

JEZ stops at the door and looks back.

JEZ
Love you.

WALT

WALT
Love you too.

JEZ exits.

WALT looks at all the stuff on the ground.

With a sigh, he puts the hand sanitizers back in the bag. He hesitates with the last bottle.

WALT
We lived. We thrived.

He squeezes some gel into his hands, rubs them, and follows JEZ out.