

Who's Afraid of COVID-19?

by Max Wilkinson

Scene 1

A house boat. Winter.

A man wears a gas mask and cooks a stew.

The boat rocks gently, a storm gathering outside.

The boat is cozy and warmly lit yet uncluttered.

MALIK, in the mask, is in his late twenties, average height, intelligent, British-any ethnicity. Middle-class.

FREYA is a few years older. She is good-looking and pale. She sits drinking wine.

MALIK tries to stay jolly.

FREYA

How long do you reckon before we kill each other? Like axe in the snow, here's-johnny-kind-of-thing?

MALIK

Um...two weeks?

FREYA

Can't imagine you wielding an axe though. You'd probably come at me at night with a pillow.

MALIK

Sneaky.

He crosses to fill her glass with a box of wine.

FREYA

I'd poison you, bleach in the milk. A boat's quite good for a murder, isn't it? I could toss you off the side, weigh you down with rocks. Wrap you up in a big black bag.

He tries to touch her hand but she removes it.

MALIK

Your hands are dry...

FREYA

Or throw you in the weir, let the Thames take you.

MALIK

This wine's nice!

FREYA

Well, don't drink too much, you'll piss the bed.

MALIK

(laughing) That only happened once!

FREYA looks down at the sleeping bag on the floor.

FREYA

Three times. Anyway, it doesn't matter, gone are the days when I'd wake up in the morning, immersed in your piss.

MALIK

Lucky I'm sleeping alone then.

FREYA

Yes, your little bed is officially the most depressing thing I've ever seen.

MALIK

I think it's cozy.

FREYA

It's not, it's disgusting.

MALIK

Sure.

FREYA

Don't try to be positive, Malik. Just embrace it. You're fucked.

He bangs something down lightly.

MALIK

Ok, come on!

FREYA

What?

MALIK

We said joshing.

FREYA

This *is* joshing.

MALIK

No it's not. It's verbal rape.

FREYA

Define joshing.

MALIK

A few... lighthearted digs. Bit of horseplay.

FREYA drinks her wine.

You can't just sling shit at me *all the time*. Let's sling some shit at someone else. We used to love doing that.

FREYA

Like who?

MALIK

...Um...the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That incredibly annoying video of celebrities singing 'Imagine'?

FREYA yawns.

Maybe we should get a cat. Absorb the hate.

FREYA

No.

MALIK

We need a system, then.

FREYA

You broke up with me Jack. Remember?

MALIK

We agreed.

FREYA

Look, if you don't like it, you could always leave. Or there's your parents, friends.

MALIK

You know I can't.

FREYA

Become homeless, then?

MALIK

If I left, how would you pay your rent?

FREYA

That's true, you're my rent boy.

MALIK

But actually no... cos your parents could pay that. At a push. So...in the end...you want me here.

She laughs.

Even if it's three months of hell, you'd prefer to have me. That's how lonely you are.

Beat.

FREYA raises her glass to him and smiles.

FREYA

Well done. You've cracked Enigma.

Pause. JACK goes back to chopping vegetables.

I can actually imagine it.

MALIK

What?

FREYA

Murdering you? *'Ex-couple stuck on boat for three months kill each other in drunken rage'.*

MALIK

Mmm.

FREYA

You should write a play about it.

MALIK

I'm not going to write a play about it.

FREYA

But you're a playwright. That's what you tell people. Which is amazing.

MALIK

Why?

FREYA

Well it's like telling them you're a sex offender. Or a Poet.

MALIK

Not like a painter?

FREYA

No. Painting is obviously cool.

MALIK

Shame you fucked all of that up then.

FREYA

...Yes, it is.

MALIK

No Freya,

FREYA

Go on, tell me how shit I am, go on!

MALIK gets a piece of paper, sits and starts writing.

FREYA

What are you doing?

MALIK

Making a rota.

FREYA

What?

MALIK

Ok, so Mondays we sit on opposite sides of the room.

FREYA

Jesus!

MALIK

Headphones. Dinner in silence. Maybe a film.

FREYA

Tuesdays?

MALIK

Jog, yoga, then at night you can...slag off my mum, or my clothes, or how I'm quite shit in bed.

FREYA considers this.

But then dinner we've got to have the semblance of a conversation. Music, films, the fact that you can see the stars cos the pollutions gone.

FREYA yawns, bored.

But then Friday, is treat day. You can punch me in the shower, put glass in the cereal. Just totally ruin me.

FREYA

And Saturday?

MALIK

We fuck each other.

She laughs.

MALIK

Not for fun. For the exercise.

FREYA

You've changed your tune.

MALIK

We're gonna have to.

FREYA

No, the idea of you throbbing above me like a some horrible beige dildo is more than I can take. Anyway, you never wanted it *when we were still together*. You obviously found me so repulsive.

MALIK

...No I didn't.

FREYA

Oh, you met someone else?

MALIK

No.

FREYA

What then?

MALIK

It doesn't matter.

FREYA

Tell me Malik. Or I'll bring Friday's bitch fest forward.

MALIK

No.

FREYA

You were cheating.

MALIK

No! It's...the boat.

FREYA

What about the boat?

MALIK

It's a bit of a... passion killer.

FREYA

Why?

MALIK

You're gonna explode.

FREYA

Why!

MALIK

It's a bit smelly.

FREYA

What?!

MALIK

Everything else is great, it's just-

FREYA

The passion?

MALIK

Yeah.

FREYA

Why?!

MALIK

No.

FREYA

Tell me.

MALIK

Freya.

FREYA

WHY IS IT A PASSION KILLER?!

MALIK

BECAUSE WE SHIT IN A BOX! Ok?! We shit in a little white box. And every Sunday we have to take that little white box down the dock and dump it down a big grey hole. In front of a million joggers. There's no doors to the bathroom, Freya, every time someone's got to go, we have to wear headphones. Does that turn you on?

Beat. He goes back to the vegetables. She jumps up and starts packing his things.

FREYA

How dare you.

MALIK

Freya.

FREYA

I let you stay here, even after you *broke* up with me. Cos there's a deadly fucking virus outside.

MALIK

Freya.

FREYA

And then you go an insult my way off life.

MALIK

I'm not!

FREYA

You ungrateful shit!

MALIK

Freya!

FREYA

Get out! Get your notebooks and your pants and fuck off under a bridge.

He tries to touch her arm.

MALIK

Freya.

FREYA

Don't touch me.

She packs up his stuff.

MALIK

(sarcastic) I love the boat, ok? I love it. I love the tiny oven and the fact that I've been cooking for five hours. I love freezing my nuts off on the floor.

FREYA

Get out.

MALIK

I love finding a dead pigeon in the bed.

FREYA

Fuck off!

MALIK

You're ridiclous.

MALIK takes the bag from her. He starts packing his own things angrily.

FREYA

You always hated it, didn't you?

MALIK

No.

FREYA

Yes you did. You were always ready to jump ship! No fucking pun intended!

MALIK

I wasn't the one sneaking off to the man in Stoke Newington

FREYA

Nothing ever happened.

MALIK

Bull-shit!

FREYA

...So ungrateful.

MALIK

I'm very fucking grateful, actually! Because I don't have anywhere to go. And I'm a fucking louse. And you've got my balls in a clamp. And everything's just totally fucked. Ok? Is that what you want to hear?

Beat. He packs his bag.

FREYA

Where you gonna go?

MALIK

Alastairs.

FREYA

You know you can't.

MALIK

I'll find somewhere alright, a hotel.

FREYA

They won't have you.

MALIK

Why the fuck do you care? Seriously? It doesn't matter! We broke up. The contract's finished. Why do you give a shit?

FREYA

You broke up with me.

MALIK

No I didn't.

FREYA

You did.

MALIK

I said the words, yeah, but... you knew we had to.

FREYA

...Yeah.

MALIK

We were killing each other... and now we're just digging each other up. And killing each other again.

Beat. Then he carries on packing. Ready to go.
Leave the other stuff out in a box. There's not much.

FREYA

No.

He turns back.

MALIK

What?

FREYA

You've got no where to go.

Beat. He looks at her.

MALIK

Why are you keeping me here? Because you worry about me? Because the rent? Because you'd be lonely? Because you like torturing me? Because...you care.

FREYA

...

MALIK

...A bit of everything I guess.

She looks at him. She looks down.

FREYA

No.

MALIK

What then?

FREYA

...I can't.

MALIK

What?

FREYA

...When I look at you, I still see... a friend. I guess... it's hard to...do that to a friend.

MALIK

When I look at you...

FREYA

What?

MALIK

Freya. Just because I said the words... doesn't mean. I wouldn't take it back. It doesn't mean. I don't still. ...you know...love you.

He lowers his bag.

He touches her face.

She stops him.

But holds his hand.

FREYA

But it doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

MALIK

But not impossible... Right?