

Bare legs

The fact that my date comes to pick me up in shorts immediately feels uncomfortable, although that clothing naturally fits our destination, a picnic on the beach, and this balmy summer evening. Those bare hairy men's legs have an intimacy, a homeliness that doesn't suit a first date. I changed a few times, and also stood in front of the mirror in high-cut jeans, which I once felt sexy in. When I got divorced for the second time, and in the depths of my depression over so many failed lives, sat in the bar with my soon-to-be-ex-husband's best friend, desperately trying to save our marriage, asking him for advice, this friend said: "Show your legs". He grinned. I was confused. Could I get my ex back like this? No, he looked at me as a man. I could seduce new men with my legs. He looked to the future. I to the past. I wanted to crawl back in time. I always want that. When it's too late.

"Are you on Tinder?" my ex husband's friend asked.

I shook my head. Tinder, that was for losers.

"I'll pay the bill". And I walked back in despair. The fragments of my life. My second marriage was over. It would be years before I decided to start internet dating.

For this unusually mild summer evening, I choose a white short-sleeved T-shirt, blue cotton sweater, tied around my hips, long skinny jeans. Perhaps it will still cool down by the sea, the wind may pick up. From the car, my date called to see if I had two plates and spoons. I hand him the dishes, but the obvious working together of a couple, which we are not, feels uncomfortable. He asks if he will put my backpack in the trunk but I shake my head. Bag always clamped on my lap or between the legs, so that you can jump out of the car if necessary, I learned as a hitchhiker. Memories of hitchhiking holidays. In a truck with unshaven men who spoke a language I didn't know. Crammed into a small passenger car with groping men. Men exchanging glances in the rearview mirror. The smell of alcohol and hashish in a strange car. Refuse to get in. Sorry to have entered. Say I wanted out.

I press my backpack close to me. A slight worry comes over me. Should I have informed someone that I am going to the beach with a date? Need to give someone their name and company website? No one knows who I'm with, and where to. By having me picked up from home, he now knows my address. I shake those thoughts off my mind and try to concentrate on his constant chatter: about his son, his ex, their house in the poshest neighbourhood in Amsterdam, "Old South", that became too small when they had a child, how he renovated their new house all by himself. had. He keeps talking.

"And then I said to my son, you can come on one condition, that I determine the time when we go back."

I don't remember what it's about and why he's telling me this. I try to take the conversation to the environment, outside, I don't have a car and like to look at the scenery while being driven. Luckily he takes us to a stretch of beach I know, to a parking lot where there are a lot of people, a beach club where I often go. Known is safe. From the trunk he takes a Tesco plastic bag with groceries, a cool box and beach tent, and we walk onto the beach. While he unfolds the mini-tent with a grand gesture, which I absolutely will not crawl into with him, he says:

"4.95 at Lidl. Very handy so that no sand gets into the food, and against the wind!"

He unpacks a mini raclette set with three tea lights as a heater underneath, we're going to raclette! The set looks like it didn't cost more than £4.95 at Lidl either, and I'm sure we're

not going to raclette. He takes two pre-cut slices of raclette cheese from a Tesco plastic package. The tea lights keep blowing out, despite the fact that the raclette set is in the beach tent, and his lighter no longer works. He asks for fire from a passerby, but the bushman shakes his head. My date fishes out plastic quarter liter bottles of wine from the cool box and explains how handy that is, this small size, because then you don't have any wine left over. I drink two whole bottles, with the Tesco pre-cut baguette with cold raclette cheese, he three. He also has humus and crackers, falafel and little cucumbers, all from the Tesco, wrapped in plastic. The humus and falafel are dry, the crackers hard, the cucumbers tasteless. I'm sure he's never prepared food for a vegetarian. I had offered to cook something, but that was absolutely not necessary, he had said. Meanwhile he talks about his ex's cheating, about his persistent impotence when that relationship ended, not only with new women, but also masturbating was no longer possible, about his visits to massage retreats, sexual dance evenings, tantra sex weekends, sex therapists. I watch the setting sun turn the sky pink and orange, listen to the rhythm of the sea, my bare feet in the warm sand. It's a fantastic evening, but how I would have loved to spend it alone here, without stories of failed erections.

There is a strong wind, and with my eyes I follow the arts of the surfing boards. Only then do I remember that my first date with my surfer ex was at this place. How he sucked me in with his light green eyes, his firm stride, how he immediately grabbed my hand tightly as we walked along the pier, a familiarity as if we had known each other for years. I fell head over heels for him. He let me watch as he undressed and put on his surf suit over his bare body. His skin white, hairless, his body strong and vulnerable. He joked that after surfing in this cold water he looks like a girl, with his shriveled penis. I lowered my eyes. Followed his tricks, walking alone along the shoreline. I didn't question the fact that he went surfing on our first date. The probing questions he asked me when we had a drink by the fire in the beach bar afterwards, he hot chocolate, me beer:

"Are you religious?"

"Why are you drinking?"

His wet dark curls, his Jewish nose, the sensitive features around his beautiful mouth.

"Will you sleep over?"

He drove me to his house. His bed. The salt on his skin. An uncontrollable cry. I consoled. He couldn't make love, his divorce was still too fresh, but we crawled into each other's naked bodies. We stayed awake until morning, not wanting to miss a moment of each other.

And now I'm sitting with a balding man with a belly, who pours his whole stagnant sex life over me, next to a Lidl beach tent that will be torn up by the wind at any moment, or taken away.

"Don't you want to sit in the tent?"

No!

"Don't you want to sit on the blanket?"

No!

Stuck in listening to stories. In the middle of his next story, about a guru who taught him to meditate, which he has been doing every morning ever since, which I don't believe, I interrupt:

"I have to go home on time, my daughter is sick."

While we are packing the things, he hastens to tell that he wants to write a book about his life, has done a wine tasting course, has renovated all his houses himself, runs a company of

over 100 people, and actually does not need to work any longer after selling his previous company. In the car back he says that his last date was also such a beautiful woman, and that she left him when it got serious, that she was only interested in sex. The last thing on my mind is having sex with this man. When we are almost at my house he says:

"I don't think you want a second date." He doesn't even ask this.

When I get home I suppress my urge to open a glass bottle of good wine and smoke a cigarette. I curl up in bed. Like a snail I crawl back into my house. A couples therapist once explained me, when I described how I felt trapped in my now ex-husband's stories: "Not the narrator but the listener determines the conversation, through the questions, through unbiased open listening." I hadn't asked any questions. I already had my judgment made on the shorts.

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