

# Echoes of Isolation

Stories from  
the Time of Corona

**SAMI KALLIOKOSKI**





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the Time of Corona



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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	v
1 The First Remote Meeting	1
2 Love Letter from Quarantine	4
3 Ghost Dates	7
4 A Dance on the Balcony	10
5 The Restaurateur's Last Wine	14
6 Underground Nights	17
7 My Last Passenger	20
8 In the Shadows of Home Care	23
9 Winner of the Closed World	26
10 Pandemic Purchases	30
11 The Door That Must Not Be Opened	34
12 School Meals to the Doorstep	37
13 In the Shadow of Shared Custody	40
14 A Mask-Swap Encounter	43
15 Into the Depths of Conspiracy	46
16 The Silence of the Care Home	49
17 A Busy Shift	52
18 Remote Yoga and an Existential Crisis	55
19 The Last Embrace	58
<i>Afterword</i>	61
<i>About the Author</i>	62

## Foreword

We were together, yet apart.

When the world came to a halt, people vanished from the streets — but life did not disappear. It moved inside our walls, behind screens, into letters, into gestures that could not be touched.

The pandemic wasn't just statistics and restrictions — it was made of small, private moments that etched themselves into us more deeply than the headlines. It was the first remote meeting where everyone fumbled with their microphones. It was love letters sent across closed borders. It was the last bottle of wine in a restaurant, the silent days in a nursing home, and dancing on a balcony when loneliness turned into music.

Each story in this book is an echo from that time. They tell of people who searched for one another amid fear and uncertainty — sometimes in letters, sometimes in glances behind masks, sometimes in rule-defying gatherings where the moment mattered more than tomorrow.

Maybe you'll find yourself in these stories too.

# Acknowledgments

I want to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement throughout the making of this collection. A special thank you to everyone who shared stories, experiences, and memories from the time of the pandemic – without you, this book would not exist. And most of all, thank you to *you*, the reader who picked up this book. I hope you found something within its pages that spoke to you.

– Sami Kalliokoski





## The First Remote Meeting



**W**hen offices closed and work moved into home offices, everything was new. The first remote meetings were full of technical hiccups, awkward silences, and unfamiliar dynamics. But was it just a clumsy beginning — or the start of something that would change the world forever?

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Joonas woke up ten minutes before the meeting. His eyes were still heavy with sleep, and for a moment, he just stared at the ceiling, realizing he didn't have to run for the metro today. No need to rush into the shower, button up a collared shirt, or even

wonder how traffic might look.

He rose slowly, stretched his back, and ran his fingers through his hair. February 2020 was fading toward spring, but the world outside was still gray, and the window of his tiny studio apartment was fogged from the night's cold. He walked into the kitchen and reached for the coffee grounds — but paused. Would he have time to brew a cup before the meeting started? Maybe not.

His laptop was still on the living room table. His “desk chair” was just a regular dining chair that creaked whenever he shifted. He opened the laptop, and the Teams icon bounced on the screen before the program came to life. He glanced at his reflection — T-shirt, messy hair, and a sleepy face. Camera off.

The meeting began.

The first minute was chaos as everyone struggled to get their microphones working.

*“Mika, we can’t hear you.”*

*“Wait, these settings... hold on...”*

*“Now we hear you!”*

*“Oh wait, it’s gone again.”*

Joonas leaned back in his chair and watched as familiar faces appeared on the screen. Some had a plain white wall behind them, others were at their kitchen tables, and one had a virtual beach background that shimmered weirdly every time he moved — like a glitching hologram blending with reality.

Ten minutes in, the group had finally settled into silence — except for one, who had forgotten to mute their mic. In the background, a child yelled, and a dog barked.

The manager cleared his throat. “Welcome to our first remote meeting.” He smiled at the camera and continued, “This is new for all of us, but we’ll get used to it. We have some exciting times

ahead.”

Exciting. Joonas wondered if that was the right word. Reality had changed so quickly, no one had truly grasped what was happening. Just yesterday, they’d been sitting in their open office, laughing at the coffee machine and complaining about the air conditioning. Now, they were all in their own homes — alone, but together through a screen.

His eyes drifted toward the chat blinking at the edge of the screen:

*“Anyone actually wearing pants in this meeting?”*

*“Pants? What are those?”*

*“Business casual: blazer on top, boxers below.”*

He pressed his lips together, stifling a laugh. The manager kept talking about strategies and upcoming projects, but Joonas’s thoughts wandered. He looked toward the coffee maker — maybe now he had time to brew that cup?

One colleague disappeared from the screen, only to return a moment later with a fork in one hand and a steaming plate in the other. No one said a word.

The meeting dragged on. Eventually, the manager raised his hand and smiled: “That went pretty well. Same time tomorrow.”

Joonas closed his laptop and leaned back. The workday had only just begun, but it already felt like he’d spent a week indoors. He rubbed his face and finally went to brew his coffee.

Remote work life had begun.