

It had been exactly 39 days since the last time I saw my partner. At the beginning of March, I made the decision to move in with my Mother in Tucson, where I had resolved to stay with her until the crisis was over. I needed to move out of my Tempe home by April 30th, so I made the trek from my parents' house in Tucson back up to Tempe and enlisted my partner's help in moving the last of my possessions. It felt dangerous, and even though it was essential travel and we've both been strict with social distancing since March, I must have asked at least ten times if she was sure it was safe. She assured me it was. I told her I was not sure if I could hug her. She told me it was okay.

Before this whole crisis began, we had just started a conversation about moving in together. The 39 days apart provided some clarity: We wanted to take that leap as soon as it was safe to do so. As we looked at the stacks of boxes on my kitchen floor, we decided that some could be stored in her apartment. It was strange, because when 2020 began I had this vision of us packing up my stuff and moving in together. Here it was happening, but it wasn't this joyous event, it just felt solemn.

She cleared out space in her guestroom and we hauled boxes up three flights of stairs before we sat, winded, in her living room. It was so bittersweet—the hope of imagining this future together and the reality of our current separation.

My favorite thing about our relationship is that it's been defined by laughter. We're always on some type of adventure, working on some new inside joke, and always pranking the other. But in isolation, it's been hard for us to keep up the playful parts of our relationship. We can't go on adventures, we can't prank one another, and sometimes everything feels too serious to joke at all. Somedays, we're too tired and sad to even talk much.

As we moved things from my apartment to hers, she tried her best to cheer me up. She checked in with frequent *are-you-okays* and trotted out her best comedic material to elicit laughs. She's become quite the TikTok aficionado in quarantine, and many of our jokes right now are shaped by the absurdist videos on the internet. Sure enough, each time we placed a new box in the car, she loudly yelled "CAROLE BASKIN", a reference to the TikTok Tiger King inspired dance. Soon, throughout the afternoon, we'd both break out in the TikTok Song.

*CAROLE BASKIN!*

*Killed her husband,*

*WHACKED HIM.*

*Can't convince me that it didn't*

*HAPPEN*

*Fed him to tigers*

*THEY SNACKIN*

*CAROLE BASKIN!*

As we sat in her apartment on Sunday evening, I got an idea. I walked to the front of the couch like I was presenting at a conference.

"Play the music!"

“What music?”

“Play the Carole Basking song!”

It took me a few times before I began to freestyle some moves.

“You have to use your hips more!” she directed.

“What? No, I don’t!”

She pulled up another video for reference.

“All the good TikTok dancers use their hips!”

I tried again, this time bouncing my hips in ridiculous fashion.

*CAROLE BASKIN!* (I shook my hands above my head)

*Killed her* (I drew my thumb across my throat) *husband* (I pointed to my ring finger)

*WHACKED HIM* (I mimicked an axe movement)

*Can’t convince me that it didn’t* (I wagged my fingers and made an X across my chest with my arms)

*HAPPEN* (I tapped my arms by my side)

*Fed him to tigers* (I gestured from my chest out)

*THEY SNACKIN* (My outward arms made the alligator chomp twice on beat, before I drew my arms up to claws)

*CAROLE BASKIN!* (I bounced on my hip and flared my tiger claws outward with a rawr expression)

By the time the dance was over, my partner was howling with laughter and I was too. It was the hardest we had laughed together in weeks.

Before this pandemic started, I thought TikTok was silly. I still have no plans to join TikTok and I sincerely hope my TikTok dances never end up on the internet. I’ve also never seen Tiger King and I have no plans to and I keep hearing about Joe Exotic with no idea who that is.

But honestly it doesn’t matter what I think about TikTok or Tiger King, because I know they make my partner laugh. They bring *her* joy during this terrible time. I know that a lot of other people feel that way right now too.

So here I am, documenting my first TikTok dance; Or, as I like to think of it, a strange act of love in the midst of this pandemic.