

HERA



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CARE

Tiniest Things

*"In human closeness
there is a secret edge,
Nor love nor passion can
pass it above,
Let lips with lips be joined
in silent rage,
And hearts be burst
asunder with the love.*

*And friendship, too, is
powerless plot,
And so years of bliss with
noble tends,
When your heart is free
and known not,
The slow languor of the
earthy sense."*

Anna

Akhmatova

I'm not sure how many days, weeks, or months (sometimes it even feels like years) have already passed since I've been self-isolating with my boyfriend in our tiny apartment in Berlin, Pankow. The second countywide lockdown is nearing in November. We are very bad at structuring our days, planning work hours, deciding which movies to watch before going to sleep and eating full breakfast in the morning. Being unable to structure a day and also not leaving the apartment means dealing with an extremely distorted perception of time. Mostly, it feels like time "flies": you wake up, you do some work, do dishes, watch a random TV show, read a few sentences from the book that you were supposed to finish one month ago, listen to the news, maybe make some coffee, and voilà! The day is almost over.

For some reason, we don't have any windows in our apartment so the only way to let the air in is a balcony door. We leave it open throughout the whole day, even during the winter, otherwise, the air becomes heavy. The apartment is weirdly located, so every time the sun is up, pressure and heat rise and the room feels like a sauna without damp. As a bonus to the heat, it seems like all the flies, bees and mosquitoes feel incredibly welcomed here during summer. They are not. I could easily jump from the 5th floor out of panic if the bee were to sit on my arm. If hell exists and it's personalized, mine would be a desert filled with insects. I hate summers hugely enough even in its most comfortable and mild manifestations.

To conclude, our apartment (especially in COVID-19 times and during the summers) is basically a tiny hell on earth. But I do still love it. I love how the mailbox has both of our names on it, and how when packages or letters come, our names are mentioned. I feel the joy of a child successfully pretending to be an adult at those moments. We bought an air humidifier to keep our skin hydrated (self-care is important they said) put it next to our comfortable couch, tucked into the blankets, both in weird positions (as if we were playing twister) and read. Sometimes we would read aloud to each other, then fall asleep without noticing and wake up from the sun in our eyes.

The most comforting and soothing part of the day is when my boyfriend cooks food for us (mostly pasta in thousands of variations) and I am lying on the couch, listening to some new podcast, or watching political debates, while my mouth is watering from smelling garlicky frying goodness on the pan. At those moments, more than ever, the apartment feels like home.

I often see articles stating that the divorces in China, US and Europe doubled after the quarantine. I used to screenshot the articles and memes about this and send them to my friends, joking about being on the verge of a breakup myself. But I joked about other people's divorces not out of lack of compassion of course, but just because the problem did not seem real. Now, I'm starting to feel a bit worried. What could boredom (and being stuck in a tiny uncomfortable apartment in the heat and cold) eventually, do to a relationship? Could our lives together and our beloved "tiny hell" apartment turn into pure hell drained of any love and care if the quarantine goes on too long?

But day by day, strangely, we seem to grow closer. He throws away trash, cleans dishes, goes shopping - does all the things I hate to do, and occasionally even hunts down mosquitos for me. I make coffee for him every morning and give him the vitamins for the day, adjust his mask before he goes out, write all the necessary emails and make all the doctor's appointments which for some reason, makes him anxious.

Sometimes, when the world outside our apartment windows seems too unstable, unsafe and confusing, the tiniest of things (like knowing that someone will take little burdens off your day just to make you feel better - like taking out the trash and making a delicious dinner or a good cup of coffee and giving you the vitamins for the day, or adjusting your mask to make it safer every time before you go out) seem more than enough to survive, even the hardest, scariest of times.