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## **Cosmonauts**

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I have a boyfriend. He's a good boyfriend, all in all. We have problems with him, but on the whole he is the kind of boyfriends without whom it would be much worse. I always find it very interesting to talk about our problems, for instance: yesterday he was going to bed, and I asked him if he would sleep in his jacket. And, imagine, he just said "yes" and went to bed. And he didn't even ask me if I would sleep in the jacket. Today, though, he asked me if I wanted to go home and take a shower, but I had already wiped myself with wet wipes and didn't want to. But the important thing is that he asked, so I'm not really mad at him. The hardest thing about our relationship is that he is very stubborn. One day we were at my house, we finally ran in to get cleaned up, and I said "Could you please step away from the window." Usually I say "Could you please" to everyone, but to him especially, because he's had problems since he was a kid, all because of an overbearing grandmother, and now he always suspects that he's under pressure. But even though I said "Could you please," he got angry, and started making tea very slowly, to my detriment. He didn't say anything, but he tapped his spoon so hard! I went to the bathroom and I could hear him tapping his spoon even through the shower. I was angry, too, but I kept quiet so as not to pressure him, I was trying to switch. I wanted to meditate, so I started thinking about the uniqueness of a space like the bathroom. It doesn't provide a sleeping space, let alone two, and that's a minus of course. But someone smart didn't make windows in it, I don't know why, but I think there's no other place like it in my house, so I thank this smart person. Then we sat naked in the hallway, because we obediently followed the two-wall

rule : only rooms with two windowless walls are safe, and even my boyfriend wasn't against it. And then I thought I was wrong about the uniqueness of my bathroom: there are no windows in my hallway either, that's why we are sitting here. We sat on wooden stools that my ex-husband's dad made in his day (even though we weren't officially married) and drank tea from a dangerous kitchen with a window taking up the whole wall. My boyfriend drank very slowly, but not to my detriment, he just hadn't realized yet that you can't drink slowly now, and I listened to the street and bent and unbent my toes to relieve the tension, because I had read about it somewhere. We had our backs against a secure wall and our knees against the front door, which my ex-husband's (unofficial) dad also made. My small flat is in a house on a street that's mysteriously called Cosmonauts. And I guess that's because they live here, but definitely not in my entryway, maybe the fifth or some other, because I've never seen anyone in ours in a spacesuit or something. And on the outside wall I have a big Soviet mosaic, also mysterious, because no one knew why they depicted a woman with six fingers there, maybe she's from outer space? It was a nice place. Then they started shooting, and we fled to the metro station. We changed the address, it began with: August, 23rd. That's the day of liberation of Kharkiv in 1943 and the name of the subway station. And we also had an address at the station: the Red Coverlet across from the ninth car, but sometimes we moved. When you live in the subway, the pluses are obvious, but there are plenty of minuses, too.

These are the disadvantages of living in the subway:

- the lights are always on, even at night
- ones have to clean the toilets, but nobody wants to
- there is no refrigerator or anything like that

- you have to wake up early cause others wake up at 6 a.m. and start saying "good morning" because the curfew is over, and they can go home or stand in line for groceries
- there is only one electric kettle for the whole station, because the sockets don't hold
- it's cold there, that's why we slept in jackets
- and you have to sleep on the floor
- and there are no showers

These are the pluses in the subway:

- It's safe there

And the main personal thing: we could be there with my boyfriend 24 by 7, and he didn't think that I was pressuring him and that he lacked freedom. He used to always tell me that, even though we didn't see each other every day. He also used to say that he didn't understand why he should get married, and wanted me to name at least one reason, and I didn't have anything to say except: "I don't know, it's more fun together." And he didn't believe there were cosmonauts living in the house. I think it's because of his grandmother, too. Now we did almost everything together, and we very rarely fought. I cried a lot, we hugged a lot, we ate instant noodles out of a clipped plastic bottle, I meditated or tried to, we supported each other and others. Outside it was dangerous, curfew was starting earlier and earlier, and we went to take a shower less and less, often we just wiped ourselves with wet wipes. And one day I walked the rails and tunnels to the train station. It was possible because the subway trains weren't running anyway, now they had people living there. My boyfriend stayed. Then I left Kharkiv, and the next day he sent me pictures and a video of the broken window in my small apartment covering my

kitchen with shards of glass, and of the hallway with a front door, which we were leaning on with our knees, shattering against the wall that we were leaning on with our backs. My frightened apartment was puking with things, and everything was lying sadly on the floor mixed up with the remains of doors and parts of the balcony. It turned out that the two-wall rule didn't always work, especially if the shell demolished the front wall of the house with the entryways, though the bathtub was indeed still in perfect order, and so was the mosaic. My boyfriend texted me that he was very sad and that it was indeed more fun together, and that my apartment was where the cosmonauts lived, and that it was us, and how good it was that we had time to fly away. I'm not mad at him at all anymore, now he lives on another space metro station, closer to his home, and they have a girl there with a live fox, and at home he has an overbearing bedridden grandmother, and he brings her groceries and medicine, when they dont bomb. I miss him a lot, too. We have everything nice and quiet and warm here, but sometimes I really want to lie down and sleep in my jacket. And I lie down, and then the light is on all night, and I wake up at 6 a.m., and text him: "good morning, my cosmonaut".