

Tiny Acts and Big Dreams

Imani is the joy-bringer. She makes hilarious jokes and arch observations amidst the mundane. Her raucous laughter has been the backbone and soul of this three-bedroom apartment even before its tenants were confined to it because of a scary virus.

Qing is the quiet one. She is serious and studious and looks like a timid mouse that would activate anyone's protective instincts. She might be annoyed that she left her overprotective parents just to fall into the laps of two motherly roommates, but Imani and I do not care the slightest. We all know she needs us to chase away the lazy college boys that ask her on dates only when a term paper is due.

I fall right in the middle of this trio. I enjoy Imani's boisterousness yet also understand Qing's need for peace and quiet. Imani and I remind Qing to relax and have fun while Qing and I remind Imani about assignments and due dates.

We each major in different subjects, and have different dreams in how we want to change the world.

A refugee from Somalia, Imani is very vocal and passionate about women's rights and gender equality. I get goosebumps when she talks about her dreams and vision for girls in Somalia. Qing lives in the world of science. She says she's studying hard so that Imani and I will have a greener world to live in and so that our generation will not be the last batch of humans to populate this earth. I major in Clinical Psychology because I envision a society where education about mental illnesses and therapy sessions are normalized, not hushed and tabooed.

Despite a rocky start in the first week, the three of us managed to create a harmonious routine in this chaotic pandemic. Qing knocks on our bedroom doors to wake us up because alarms are snooze-able. I make coffee because we are all caffeine-dependent. Imani sings while making breakfast because she's good at both and does not have early morning online classes on most days.

On weekends, Qing and I go grocery shopping for ourselves and our elderly neighbours. Imani drives us to the store and brings our neighbours' dogs for their daily-turned-weekly walk. When we get home, we disinfect everything before leaving the bags of groceries on our neighbours' doorstep, making sure to stand six feet away before calling them to open their doors and get their groceries.

On days when stress and anxiety get to us and make us grumpy and easily irritable, it is my job to put on an episode of Friends or The Big Bang Theory so that we can laugh our heads off while eating salted caramel popcorn. It is a tradition to then fall asleep all piled together on the same couch and complain about our respective back pains and sore necks the next day.

When Qing told us about the Chinese restaurant two streets across that got vandalised with racist phrases and broken glass windows, we had Chinese takeouts for three consecutive days and tipped them as generously as we could.

When George Floyd's death flooded our social media timelines, we were all filled with indignation and righteous anger. We wore masks and marched together with other protesters, silently acknowledging that Imani's tears represented how much this movement meant to her personally. We send each other petition links in hopes that our seemingly insignificant signatures can somehow be a minute part of an enormous positive change.

Imani, Qing and I each have our roles in this tiny apartment. We work well together to keep each other alive and sane during these crazy times. In five years, ten years, or 15 years, I hope that we each will have found our role and place in this huge society, where our different passions and work will, collectively, change this crazy world for the better.