

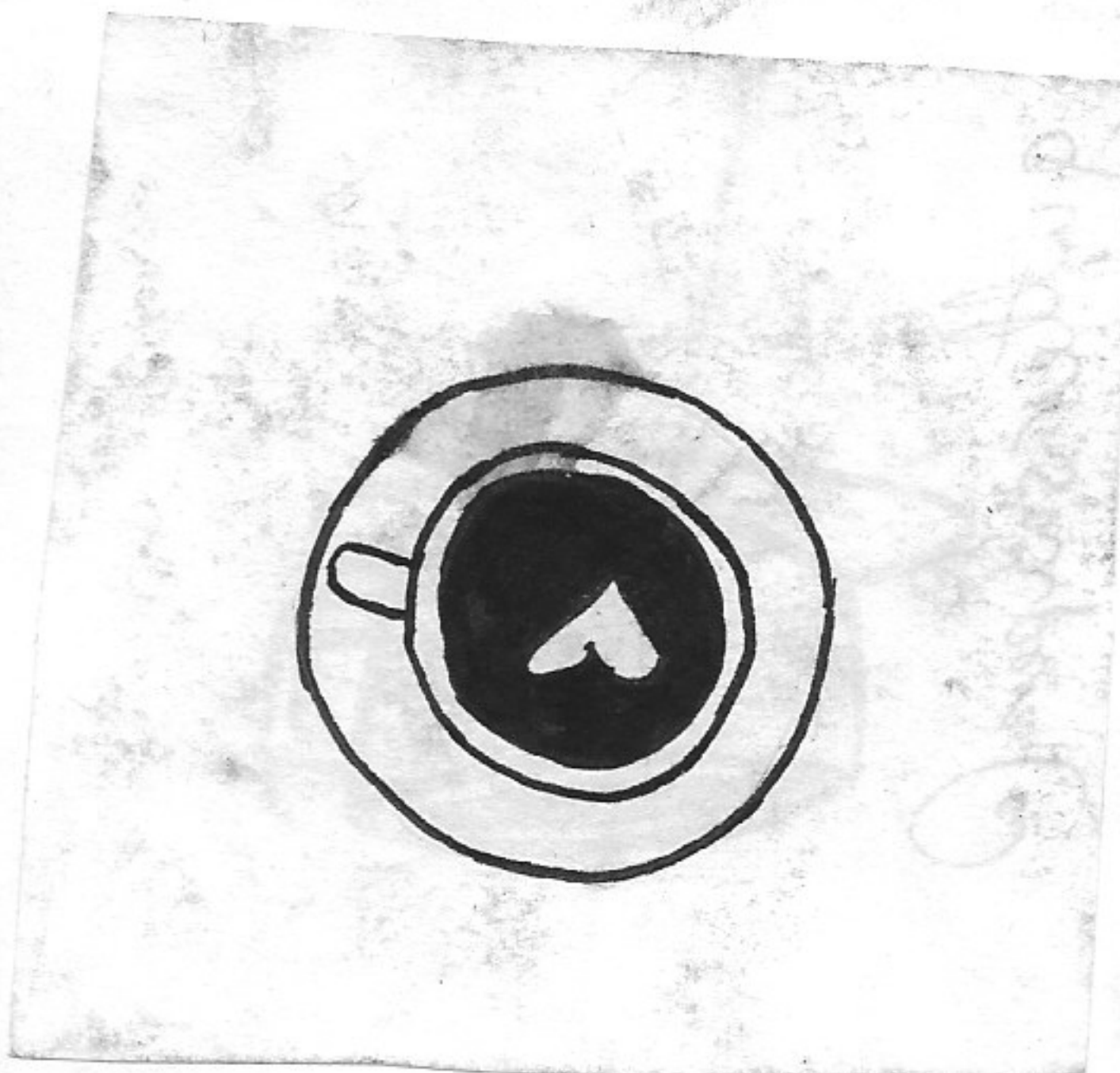
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I bought a new French press the other day, since my old one seems to have gotten lost in the move. It was chipped anyway, so I guess it was time for a replacement.

My coffee plunger is important to me, and not just because I've become a complete coffee snob. It has emotional significance because of my last relationship. R and I had a morning coffee ritual that was deeply important to me.

Before we got serious I was more of a cappuccino drinker, and I usually drank tea at home instead of coffee. R loved his French press coffee though. He was very serious about breakfast being the most important meal of the day, and it was obviously the one he enjoyed the most. Living together got me into a lot of good habits to do with meals and taking better care of myself. One large aspect of this was the coffee ritual.

He and his best friend A had lived together for years, and because of their widely varying schedules they weren't often able to have breakfast together, so R would make coffee for both of them and leave the second coffee for A to enjoy when he got up for his much later shift at work. When R and I started seeing each other regularly he brought a coffee plunger over to my place and did the same thing for me.

It was a very big deal for me at the time since I was still dealing with the aftershock of an extremely abusive relationship. I wasn't used to people doing nice things for me without using it against me somehow. I was afraid that this small gesture of affection was going to be used to manipulate or punish me later on. I was afraid of that happening with most things to be frank, so I voiced my concerns to R. He listened intently, and then proposed that we treat the coffee ritual as a beginner level lesson in what it's like to have people do nice things just for the sake of it. He promised that no matter what, I could always rely on him to do this one thing out of genuine altruism, and that I'd never be afraid of him using it against me, no matter how much I worried about everything else.

This was a revelation for me. I've always had trouble trusting people who say they love me. It always seems to be the set up for a nasty trick. But this, this was something different. Every day there was a physical reminder that this person I was so emotionally vulnerable with cared about me, and expected nothing in return for this sweet gesture.

Looking back now, I'm not sure when my perspective began to change, but at some point this attitude spread to other areas of my life, and from this small act of daily kindness I started to trust people again. I began to understand that kindness isn't always a trap, and there are a lot of people who just honestly enjoy doing nice things for those around them. I stopped being paranoid that people would think I was attempting to manipulate *them* by doing nice little things out of the blue. It helped a lot with my hyper vigilance and my reluctance to open up to people.

I'm amazed at how much I grew as a person from this little act of care and kindness. I've learned to never underestimate how much you can affect a person just by listening (or not listening) to their concerns, and that small actions like the coffee ritual are seeds that are planted inside people's hearts that can grow into beautiful forests, if only given the environment they need to survive. I will always be grateful to R for this.

I've always been scared of being honest about my likes and dislikes, my favourite things. It wasn't just my horrible ex, my family was like that too. Any little thing I expressed enjoyment in would be criticised in an attempt to control me. But now I openly call myself a coffee snob, regardless of how people make fun of me. It doesn't hurt as deeply as it used to. Again, this is spreading to other areas of my life, and now I'm able to talk about the things I enjoy and (mostly) withstand any criticism of them. It still stings a little because of the past associations, but it's different now. I can be myself now.

Now I can wear what I want, eat what I want, listen to the music I want to, watch what I want without feeling like I have to hide any hint of who I am as a person from the inevitable attacks of those around me. Well, except maybe my fondness for Japanese otome/dating sim games. That one can be just between us.