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Dental Care

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Author Bio

Amy Butcher is a small-town girl who's attending college in an even smaller location. She's a diehard tree-hugger, an uber-liberal and a super-vegetarian. She likes writing, traveling and macaroni and cheese an awful lot. She's currently a freshman, double-majoring in both English and Creative Writing with heady plans to journey to New Zealand sometime in the near future.

Dental Care

If you wanted to, you could practically taste the paint chippings that lay, scattered like sprinkles, across the white carpeting. Not that you'd want to. Neon blue walls and ashen flooring—it really made for an ugly scene, and it didn't make much sense; white carpeting alone didn't make much sense. Subway smog, dirt and grit, city-schlam—it was all going to be on display on our newly-garlanded apartment flooring.

The entire apartment is lit up—a half dozen lamps are turned on with their shades off to emit the most powerful radiance. The room probably looks like prison grounds from down on the New York night streets, all lit up like we're watching for escapees, and I tell him this. He laughs and I laugh. We laugh together.

I step into the hall and buy us two vending-machine Cokes with the two crumpled bills I have leftover from subway fare. I slide back into the room, inhale the toxic fumes, choke a bit, cough a bit, crack a window a bit and hand him one. Opening one for myself, practically a power pack in an aluminum cartridge, I ask him again why he had previously argued so intensely for this white carpeting, and would he have if he knew it would look like this? He doesn't really speak, just mumbles, just keeps on rolling his paint roller that way he does, and I put down the soda and walk back over to the door. My suitcases are there; they're brown and tan and army-green, camouflaged if only we were in the woods, and I haul them into our bedroom. It's the first room we'll live in together, and the last place I feel like being.

I hear the lights tinker off in the room next door and he stumbles in with that smug little grin on his face. He seats himself on the new sheets that cover the bed (our bed)—looking rugged the way he does—in the corner of the room, and he rubs the little spot to the right of his fanny; I sit down next to him and he breathes in deep, saying to me, "I thought this is what you wanted."

An apartment in New York City where we could both live together, as boyfriend and girlfriend, as fiancés, as aspiring writers, as the best of friends—isn't this what I wanted? And not just New York City, but Greenwich Village; it's a place where writers like us can hatch from young-adult eggs to fulltime-adult beasts. We could grow like that together.

There's not much else to say except the truth, here; no real opportunity for stellar lines or speeches of amplitude. I lean against his broad shoulders, slimming in his cut T-Shirt, and I inhale deeply. It's getting dark out; you can see for miles with our window-view. Miles of lights and miles of buildings and miles of people sitting on their beds who are all looking out at the miles, too.

I chose not to speak, and after our microwaved TV-dinners of mashed potatoes and fish fillets (which tasted more of their containers than food) bedtime soon follows.

The morning comes as if nighttime never did. With morning comes the honking of horns, the smell of gasoline and coffee, of grits and bacon from the small honky diner below our apartment, the scent of of morning feeling. A million men stand with a million half-folded newspapers, waiting there below us for a million yellow taxicabs to stop, halt and cease so that they may all cross. Here stand a million reasons why I still don't feel comfortable in this new environment.

I stand up as he begins to stir, leaving him behind like a diminutive puppy at a pound. I can practically here a pouch's whimper. I stroll into our undersized bathroom—so tiny I feel like I'm in a cubicle—and I let my fingers swipe across the jet-black countertops. See the flaked gold embedded in the stone, feel the cold tile beneath my feet.

It is what I want. I turn to look at the still half-asleep him. I see the entire room—it's so trendy and hip. The \$198.00 sofa cushions from IKEA, the \$255.00 denim window shades, the \$561.00 recliner with automatic inflating for the best air cushioning around. My eyes hit the pewter teacups my mother had given me; I feel bad for them because they sit on the desk, perfect pariahs in this innovative apartment. They sit *there* because I have no idea where else to put them—the countertop and drawers won't be delivered for another weekend—and my mom has already given them to me. You can't just turn something like that down. It's sentimental; it's a tradition. You know?

"It is what I want." I say, and his eyes dart open within a moment's lapse. He kicks at the covers a bit and they slide in a space between his arms. He says he is glad; he reminds me he loves me. He asks if I can put the coffee pot on.

I do. I sit at the small barstool next to the plastic patio table that's currently our makeshift dinner table—until the new one we ordered comes in, that is. For some reason or another, and I can't put my finger on what it is, it doesn't feel the way it should feel. I eat a piece of toast. The way I expected it to feel. I sip some orange juice. Or the way I wanted it to feel. Feeling physically full but mentally empty, I head for the shower.

All I can think as my cold toes hit the new, green blocked tile is how I wish that, rather than dirt, showers were capable of washing away feelings. What a great ability that would be.

As I soap up, I can hardly help noticing that the water feels distinctively differently than the water I'm used to showering in. There's a difference between city water and the well water I had grown accustomed to back on the small private estate my parents owned. This water felt heavy, leaden; it felt pretty rough. Something just didn't feel right, but for the love of God, *what?*

I step out. Fumble for a towel. It's so rough against my skin; I make note that I need to pick up a new one at one of the stores downtown. My eyes hit the countertop of the sink. I see the toothpaste---not yet opened and thus not yet a mess. I see the mirror---not yet really used and thus not yet smudged. I see one single toothbrush. I step out into our room, over to our bed, I kiss

his cheek. I whisper in his ear, I say a little something to him, I promise him that I'll be right back. The small key lies there, metallic-chromosomed, on the mantle and I scoop for it with an open hand. With my other hand I reach for the knob. Copper chromosomed. And I head down *our* hall, down *the* hall, down the elevator, down 5th and Main.

The door of the small pharmacy I enter next makes a jingling sound when I open it; the bells tinkle and it almost feels as if it is Christmas time. But it's a mild mid-April and we're far past Christmas at this point. The entire mart smells of medicine and old men, and I have a hard time making out much of a difference. They both reek.

There it is. Hidden (like those camouflaged bags I was talking about earlier) behind a rack of lunch coolers. A bird in a park, I peck at one and examine it with beady eyes. A light teal color, with a head that moves to accustom cannels and corners. Its got a finger-grip for the perfect hold, that perfect feel (precision!), and the packaging makes it look like one sweet little product. It costs \$1.27—the price of a small coffee on the corner of Madison Avenue—and I pay for it in the quarters I have left over from the vending machine's soda.

I head back up to the apartment; the small brown bag in my hand, it feels so light. And it feels so golden, so healing, and I pour two mugs of coffee. I step into our bathroom. He's half-dressed by now, pulling on a pair of jeans with his eyes fixated on the painting that hangs on our wall. It's a funky, contemporary piece done by our mutual favorite artist, Roy Lichtenstein. Brilliant reds, yellows, blues; it is a plethora of superiority and a showcase of color's splendid beauty. He breaks the staring-contest with the painting and glances over; he asks what I've got in that there bag.

I remove the item and tear the packaging away from it, setting it down on the countertop. One medium-sized Johnson&Johnson toothbrush.

Stepping over next to me, he asks what the difference is between kissing him and sharing a toothbrush.

I tell him I'd never kiss him first thing in the morning. I hand him his coffee.

He looks at me as if I'm kidding, as if I'm joking, and I haven't felt this comfortable in days. The paint chippings smell like freedom, and now I rather like the white carpeting in the morning's light.