

The Toothbrush

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He was awakened by a sharp noise; a door being shut, he thought, maybe; but gently, with an echoing sound, almost metallic. A faint glow of artificial light coming in through the thin green fabric of the curtains reflected a vague contour of the room. The brief distant murmur of a single car engine was covered by struggling gasps. Nothing else stirred. Once the stupor began to die down, he dried his forehead with the sheets and checked the time. 3 o'clock. Only a dream, he thought. He lay still, staring at the small red blot of a crushed mosquito on the wall, going over the images now fading quickly in his head.

They were seated on the bed, their eyes failing to look at one another, without speaking. 'I'm not feeling well,' she had said, in a strained voice at last. 'I'm not feeling well at all.'

He turned. The tiny red spot become somehow unbearable now. He had killed it a month ago and tried to clean it up, but it was no use; the persistent speck remained there. He could repaint the room, he thought. No other way to make it disappear. Only it wouldn't. Not really. It would still be there, just covered up. Even if he moved, he would always know.

'I'm tired. I'm tired and I don't want this anymore.' Her voice was piercing though gentle. She was crying now, but he remained silent; his face blank. He knew what to say, in the dream, but he was unable to pronounce the words; he also knew that it would not help if he did. And he was also tired.

He thought again that it had only been a dream, and tried to force himself back to sleep.

Next, he was standing beside her, leaning on the bathroom door, and watching her dumping her toiletries into her purse –a couple of cream tubes, facial wipes, a toothbrush. Her toothbrush. She continued to the door, then past the entrance hall, and finally through the main door, which closed behind her, the latch producing a loud, metallic clink. He closed his eyes.

When he woke up again in the morning, a thick bright radiance lit up the hollow apartment, giving everything a hazy air of lethargic sluggishness. He moved away from his bed to the bathroom as if through water. He noticed it upon entering; on top of the cabinet, inside a coffee cup, there was a single white toothbrush.

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