

## *Teeth*

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When I can't sleep I sift through the life I've lived like a thin, fine flour. There are moments that won't plunge through the silver metal of the sieve. I hold them. They are the size of a tooth, hard as diamonds. I pick at them, too intensely, until my fingertips spark with blood and sinew.

The moments I can't categorize are not chronological. I let them fall and bumble into each other like dirty snow.

There is much I can't explain but Conor is first. His story blossoms across my mind like an ink stain. Did you know that in the first movies they used ink instead of blood? My first job on a film set, we filmed a scene where the protagonists burst down the doors of a neonazi militia.

Production put me inside the room they broke into, peppered with swastikas, directly out of view of the two cameras that snaked through the scene.

I was closest to Conor freshman year, living in the same hall as him. Sometimes he would hobble to my room after a rugby match and I would give him Advil and water, pressing them softly into the palm of his hand like tiny robin's eggs.

Did you know that in movies today, they simulate realism in gun scenes by firing blanks from real weapons? It was my third day on set. I have never felt an automatic weapon so close. It made my teeth rattle. Junior year of high school someone threatened to shoot our campus and we

went into lockdown, and my English teacher panicked so badly she asked me to tell my classmates what to do.

Conor ended up getting so many concussions that he was barred from rugby before freshman year even ended. In my mind, Conor always remains on the bench of a rugby match, dark brow furrowed over the fact that he can't play.

I see glints of metal out of the corner of my eye as the noise of gunfire booms around me, hundreds and hundreds of rounds as Production keeps shooting the scene over and over and over and over. I hear them start rolling and automatic weapon fire races closer to me on all sides, I am shaking and I want to throw up but I can't—

In my mind Conor is always telling me the same story. The night after he returned from spring break, he laid down in his twin bed to go to sleep and his hand brushed against something under his pillow. He had been the last person to leave his dorm, and the first person to come back.

Did you know the blood they use in movies today pools and sticks on carpet? Did you know you will find it on your shoes sometimes when you are alone in the hotel? Did you know that when you scrape at it with your fingers, the gummy, throaty heft of it will get stuck under your nails?

When I pick at this memory, I wonder what Conor felt as he drew the object out. It was small, smooth. He must have been confused, probably not yet frightened. Did he ever think it was a missing Advil I had given him?

Every time I hear the story, his face when he flicks the light on and discovers what the object is changes in my mind. Sometimes it plays as horror, sometimes fearful amusement, and sometimes his eyes disappear and his face is just skin.

Did you know, in movies today, bodies on the ground look dead even when you watch them stand up and walk away after?

When Conor looked at his hand, he saw that he was holding the tooth of a child. A back canine, small and white, bloody at the root. It was not the tooth in itself that was wholly disturbing, but the fact that it had somehow spirited itself into his locked and empty third floor dorm room.

The next day Conor told me, laughing, but his eyes watered and hair stood up on his arms. He told me he couldn't sleep that night or the night after, trying to explain how it could have gotten there. I asked him how he finally explained it.

My memory all goes red here, like a vial of blood dumped in water, at the point in the story where he told me he couldn't.