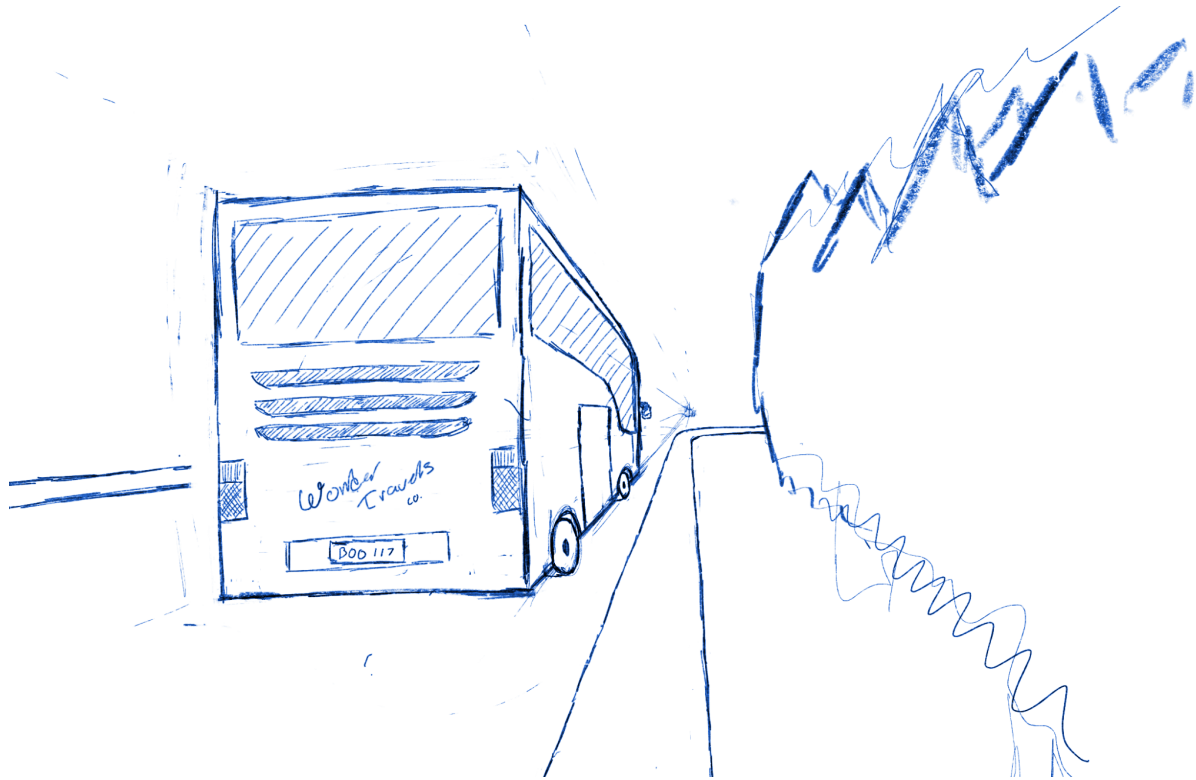




Dentist  
Dream



On the bus ride home, Hugo's aching teeth did their very best to not let him get a wink of sleep. They had been aching all day and caused a fair share of trouble. When giving his presentation on last month's revenue he fumbled the sales figures and proposed they increase spending by five hundred percent. Afterward he apologized over and over again to his stern, but secretly soft-hearted, boss Bill Johnson.

Leaning against the window, Hugo saw snowflakes moving slowly downward from the sky. He wondered if they didn't know where they were supposed to go, given their erratic swirling. Lampposts flew by as the bus drove in the little neighborhood, Hugo knew so well. When the bus arrived at the stop near his house, he stepped out and walked past a shady hooded man, smoking a cigarette. He was probably just cold and bored but Hugo couldn't help feeling a bit anxious at his appearance. With a quicker step, he walked down the path to his house.

Tessa, his wife, said she would make her famous pork and veggie sauté, and was probably now sitting in the kitchen waiting for him to come home. Once Hugo saw his almost too regular looking house, up ahead, he let out a sigh of relief. Hugo thought the best part of the day was in the evening when he could just cool down and relax with his wife, Tessa. Although today he was a bit worried about his toothache. *Maybe I won't be able to relax*, he thought.

Walking up the empty driveway to his house, he can see Tessa in the kitchen window. Her eyes glanced upward, out the window, and a wide smile appeared on her face. She jumps out of her chair and almost sprints out of sight. Hugo can't help but smile at the obvious display of affection. They'd only been married for two months and their lovebird period was far from over. Stepping up the unnecessarily small staircase to their front door, he can see movement inside from the small round window on the door. Then all of a sudden, the bursts open, almost pushing Hugo off the staircase.

"Ahh, sorry!" She exclaimed leaning forward through the door's opening.

"Heh, I'm glad to see you too." He replied after regaining his composure.

They gave each other a warm hug as per their tradition.

"Mm, it smells good!" Hugo said as he felt a waft of his wife's cooking coming from the kitchen.

"Hurry up and take your clothes off before it gets cold." She said while walking towards the kitchen with her head tilted slightly backward.

"Don't worry, I am." He said, taking off his left shoe while trying to balance on one foot.

Once finished, he stepped carefully over to the kitchen entrance and peaked his head inside. It looked delicious. Out on the kitchen table lay cutlery, plates, glasses of wine and a pan of sauté, all beautifully presented as if it were made to be photographed. Hugo sits down and, as usual, hits his forehead on the too low metal ceiling lamp.

"It seems to really like me," Hugo said while rubbing his forehead.

The cooking was great as expected. However, he seemed to have trouble chewing and the now icing pain in his mouth made it all the more difficult.

"Don't you feel well?" Tessa asked worriedly.

"No, I'm alright. Although, I'm struggling a bit with this meat." Hugo answered as he was still chewing the same piece of meat as ten minutes ago.

"Oh, did I overcook it?"

"No, don't worry. I'm probably just a bit tired."

They continued eating dinner while the dark sky outside turned inky black. Not wanting to worry his easily worried wife, Hugo decided against mentioning his toothache at all.

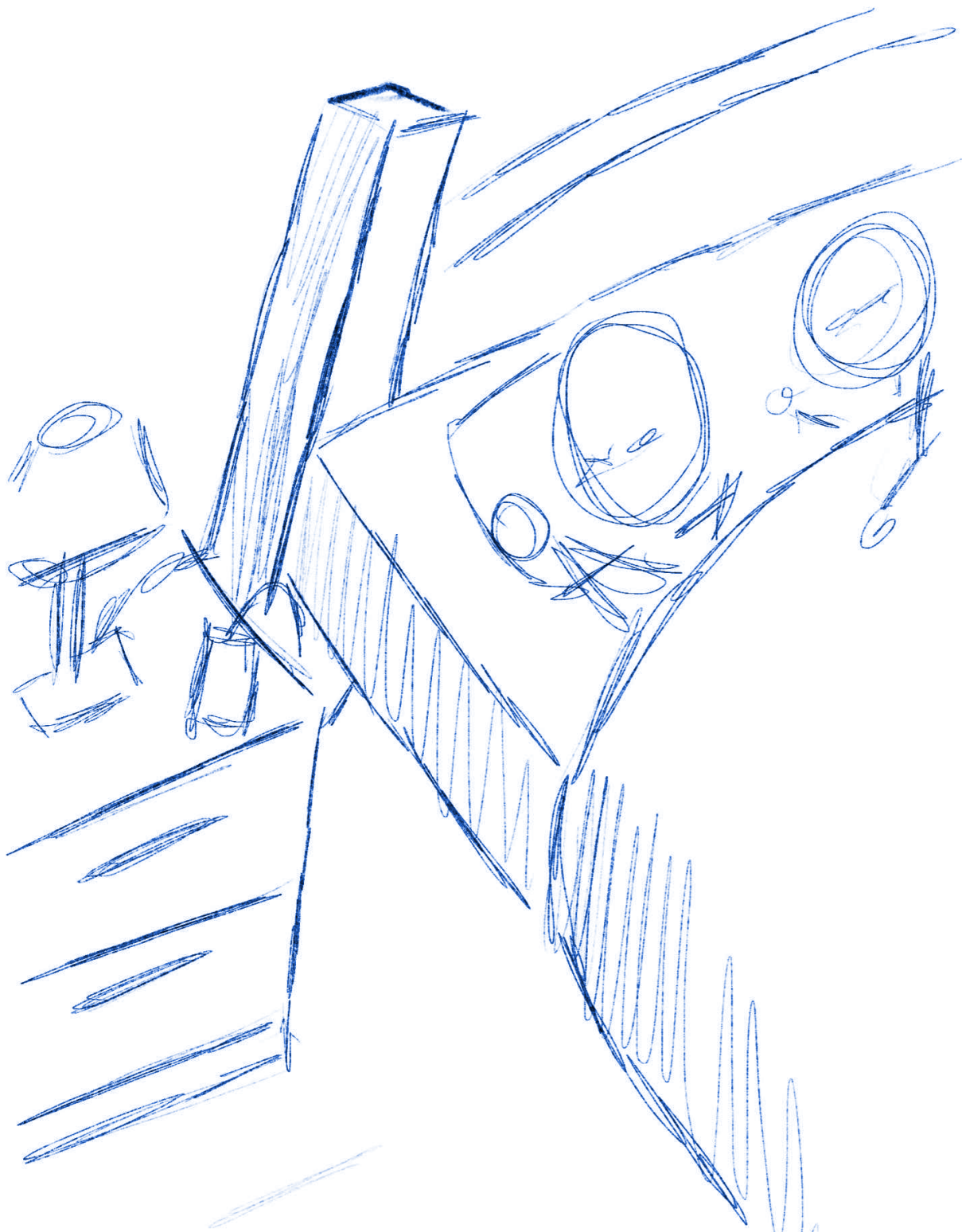
They finished up dinner, and after watching a movie on their living room couch, went upstairs to bed. The pain in Hugo's mouth had soared to a completely new level. Against his better judgment, he decided against brushing his teeth tonight. He reasoned: *It's just one night, and it would probably be impossible with this intense ache.*

"Good night, dear!" Hugo said to Tessa as they were both pulling off the sheets and getting into bed.

"Good night, you too. Love you!" Tessa replied.

"Love you too," Hugo answered back.

*Ahh, this is almost too good,* Hugo thought. *If it weren't for the toothache, life would be perfect right now.* He sighed deeply then turned around and let sleep pull him away from this world.



Dreams enveloped his tired mind and eventually he found himself out on the street just by the central bus station. He was on his way to the dentist but the wintery weather was giving him a great deal of struggle. He trudged and trudged among white snow that seemed to go on forever. He took a great leap over a snowpile and almost tumbled once upon the other side. Looking back he saw something that bothered him greatly. Where the soles of his feet had marked the earth, the snow had a reddish hue. It was only a pale red but it still caught Hugo off guard. As he trudged forward he could see red snow spilling out from where his feet touched the ground. He decided to run. He wasn't getting anywhere fast and his appointment at the dentist was only twenty minutes away.

Langley park now stood almost as thick as a forest in front of Hugo. The park had always been well decorated but with all the snow covering every possible centimeter, it was hard to see anything further than a couple of strides. Most of the park was filled with large bushes which, funnily enough, kind of resembled rows of teeth. The jagged top surface tapered down into a narrower red base where the snow hadn't been able to get in. The flowers that surrounded the bushes had been removed once the first snows of winter came. Ordinarily there were blankets of red and yellow but now it all blended into white. The park floor was covered in a thin layer of ice, just enough to make it a deadly trap for the unsuspecting. Hugo had to slow down and attempt to skid across the park's winding path.

Before Hugo could even react, a great dog pounced on him. He fell backwards and tried to protect himself by covering his face with his arms. He peeked through the gap between his arms and saw huge razor sharp teeth which drooled with saliva. The dog didn't attack him, but it did growl and bark at him with all its might. Hugo could see a figure behind it, dragging it backward and shouting for it to stop.

"I'm so sorry," said an old lady holding the dog's leash. "I don't know what's gotten into him. He's usually so kind and gentle."

The conversation became a vague mumble in Hugo's mind, but he remembers that the old lady, Gertrud, was in fact a sweet old lady and the dog wasn't as big as he initially thought. It was in fact a medium-sized bulldog who only managed to knock Hugo over because of the slippery ice.

"It's no problem, I wasn't paying enough attention." Hugo said consolingly. "I'm in a bit of a hurry."

Hugo ran off into the distance, face covered in desperation, with a single goal in mind. The road ahead was tough but he made it in time. In fact, he'd overestimated how long it would take and had a good ten minutes to spare. He walked up the wheelchair accessible ramp, opened the glass paned front door, and immediately felt a rush of warm air against his skin. The L-shaped hallway was as depressing as always. The white walls were devoid of variety except for the strange little piece of wood that lined most ordinary walls along the bottom. Gray patterns, resembling cut stone, covered the floor all the way into the waiting room.

"Hi, have you booked an appointment?" Asked a slender young man behind the reception counter.

"Ahh, no, I mean yes." Hugo replied awkwardly, scratching the back of his head. The was that Hugo didn't know if he did indeed have an appointment, all he remembers was that he had to be there by three o'clock.

"What's your name?" The receptionist asked politely.

"Hugo Hansen."

"Hmm, let me see here..."

A silence claimed the room while he vigorously pounded the computer's keyboard for answers. Hugo, feeling awkward, decided to have a look around the room in the meantime. Across from the receptionist stood two small sofas and a reclined chair that were clearly meant for waiting. On the wall above hangs a great array of magazines and pocketbooks, stories and gossip for every age could easily be found there. Curiously enough, a good deal of them had covers filled with teeth. It seemed that the stories and gossip contained a lot of info on teeth.

"Ohh, there you are. An appointment at three o'clock with Miss. Winters. In the meantime you can go ahead and take a seat while you're waiting."

"Thanks," Hugo replied, turning around and walking over to the wall of paper.