

RAPID AUTOMATIC BRISTLE MOTION

Darren hitched up his pyjama bottoms, scratched his left nipple and shambled into the bathroom. It was early and he had a slight hangover from last night – nothing serious, just red wine static – so he wasn't entirely on full beam. In fact, he had fallen onto his bed fully dressed, later enduring the discomfort of trying to undress without standing up, falling onto the floor at one point and finding his pyjamas solely through smell (they were a little musty from spending a week in the laundry basket).

Darren was just weighing up the pros and cons of shaving – pro, he'd feel better if he did it, con, he might accidentally cut his head off – when he saw the toothbrush. It was brand new, with a shiny white body and a baby blue on switch, and it had a little rotary brush on the end, also baby blue.

That wasn't the most remarkable thing about the toothbrush. The most remarkable thing about it was that Darren had never seen it in his life before that moment. He peered at it for a moment, then picked it up. His thumb brushed the on switch and it thrummed into action. Darren nearly dropped it in shock: for its size, it was remarkably powerful, like it had some kind of turbine inside it. He switched it off and turned it round in his hand, trying to remember if he'd seen it before. After a moment, he shrugged. Some girl must have left it here on her way out – there were often girls, and they tended to leave quickly in the morning – and Darren's cleaner must have found it and put it out, thinking it was his. (If part of Darren's foxed brain wondered why someone would carry a brand new electric toothbrush in their handbag and then abandon it, it never brought it up with Darren.)

Darren looked at the toothbrush, and then at his own non-electric item. Darren's toothbrush was red plastic, with a dispiriting fringe of splayed bristles like a tramp's moustache. *No contest*, he told himself, and spread toothpaste on the electric's brush. He ran a splash of water over it and pressed the on switch. This time the toothbrush seemed to run if anything even more powerfully. As Darren ran it over his furred teeth, the bristles went at their work with a distinctive sense of attack, like – it seemed to Darren – a clean-up crew sandblasting the mossy stones of an old cathedral. It was an unpleasant sensation at first, but the sheer force of it, and the obvious effect it was having on Darren's teeth, was appealing in itself. Soon he found himself actually *enjoying* cleaning his teeth.

It was about a minute into the process, a time Darren would have usually abandoned the whole brushing thing and spat out the blood-pink toothpaste into the basin, that he looked up at the mirror for the first time – Darren was not a fan of his own reflection in the morning – and saw the message. It was written in a jagged scrawl of lipstick, but it was easy to read.

Enjoy your present

Had Darren swallowed the toothpaste in his surprise, he might have choked on it. As it was, he had great difficulty in maintaining control of the toothbrush, which slid off his teeth and briefly tried to burrow into his cheek. Darren wrested back control and turned the toothbrush off. He stared at the mirror. He had literally no idea who the message was from, or what it meant. It

could, he supposed, have come from any one of a number of women who he'd dated, or slept with, or never called back. But the fact was – *was it?* asked his still rusty brain – there had been no woman here for some time. Darren thought back to last night. He recalled shouting, but no tears.

Darren shrugged. There were – there had been - worse things.

Enjoy your present

"Thanks," he said, wiping the mirror with a flannel, "I will."

He turned the toothbrush on again. Waste not, want not, as his mother used to say. Normally Darren would have abandoned the whole teeth-cleaning thing by now, but this - he had to admit it – was a damn good brush. The sheer power of the thing was invigorating, and he felt like parts of his mouth were getting attention like they never had before. A red light began to flash weakly. Low battery, he supposed. *Bitch could have left me a charger*, he thought humourlessly. The toothbrush lurched again in his hand and scraped the roof of his mouth. Darren decided it was time to quit and clicked the off switch; but nothing happened. The brush continued its whirring, relentlessly cleaning and cleaning.

Darren thumbed the switch more decisively, but nothing happened. *Low battery my ass*, he thought. He was about to take the thing out of his mouth and just drop it into the washbasin when it surged in his hand and – there was no other word for it – attacked the back of his mouth.

"Fuh!" Darren shouted as the bristles engaged with something soft in his throat. He could feel his tonsils recoil, and pulled the toothbrush back – but it simply rushed back, like something caught in the tide, and crashed into his throat again. Darren yelled as the brush attacked the back of his throat, and then yelled again as – could this be happening? – the thing seemed to take his hand with it, pulling it into his mouth hard so his fist – his *fist* – began to enter his mouth.

Darren let go, and felt a second's relief as his hand recoiled and jerked out from between his teeth, so hard he nearly bit off a finger; but the relief was immediately succeeded by horror when he realised that the toothbrush *was still trying to get into his throat*. He thrust his hand back into his mouth and

and the toothbrush just leapt.

it leapt into his throat.

it leapt *down* his throat.

How he didn't choke, Darren had no idea. Gagging, he tried to get a grip on the brush's handle as it vibrated and whirred and dove into his trachea, but his fingers slipped on saliva, and he could do nothing but grab his throat pointlessly as it travelled downwards, a miniature submarine with a fucking *brush* on the end.

Why am I not choking? Darren asked himself again.

The toothbrush, still whirring, was at the top of his chest now. He could feel it – of course he could – moving through his ribcage, resisting the peristaltic waves of his larynx trying to throw it back up again.

“Oh God!” Darren shouted, “This isn’t happening! This is not *fucking happening!*”

But it was. Down the toothbrush went, now making the bones in Darren’s chest vibrate. Down it went, towards his guts – for a wild moment, Darren wondered if stomach acid could dissolve bathroom appliances – until for a moment it seemed to settle in his tummy, then with a decisive whirr made it way onwards, to where Darren didn’t know and even in his terror didn’t want to know.

Then it stopped.

Darren waited, holding his breath. Then he shouted, “Low battery! Low battery!” into the mirror. He leaned over the washbasin, both hands gripping the side. He spat some blood and spit into the basin. He would go into the next room, call the hospital, spin them some story (*what story?* part of himself asked) and get the fucking thing surgically removed. A funny story for the nurses, a problem solved. He felt his stomach tentatively. *Why doesn’t it hurt?* he asked himself, kneading the place where it should have been tender. He could feel the hard cylinder of the thing under his skin. He –

There was a click.

“Fuck,” Darren said. “No way.”

The whirring began again. This time Darren felt it, an unwelcome internal massage. He groped at his stomach again, trying to find the off-switch, but the brush was on the move again, a rigid electric colonic with a sense of purpose. As Darren poked uselessly at his belly, he wondered what the mission was.

He found out a moment later.

Anything moving downwards in the male body has few realistic exit options. In Darren’s case, it was clear from the turbulence in his lower abdomen that the electric toothbrush had made its choice.

“OK,” Darren said, grabbing at his own buttocks, “I’m ready.”

He could feel muscles inside him clenching involuntarily and braced himself for the pain of expulsion. But then there was a sharp jab at the base of his

–

“No,” Darren moaned, “Oh, sweet goodness, no.”

And now he could feel the pain.

It hurt more than anything Darren could ever have imagined. It was like a torpedo being launched at the centre of the earth. No, like a cannonball being fired through a straw. It was a nuclear explosion in a tunnel, a supernova in a crawlspace.

“MY COCK!” Darren roared and fell to the ground. His back slammed to the floor as his hands tried to grapple with the source of the incredible pain now engorging his entire lower body. He craned his neck up.

“Oh fuck no!” Darren shouted.

His penis was sticking up – not up at an angle, but straight up. It was also about three times as wide as usual, a flesh lighthouse in a sea of pubic hair. Paralysed with pain, Darren could only watch as the toothbrush moved forward up his member. Then, just when he thought that nothing, literally nothing, in the world could be worse, the little baby blue brush emerged. Bristles and all, it emerged from the end of his penis with an almost audible pop.

For a moment it just stayed there. Then, like a periscope, it turned and - Darren knew this couldn't be but somehow it was – it turned and *looked at him*. Which was when Darren blacked out.

The paramedics took him to hospital two days after his cleaner found him, pyjamas round his ankles and an electric toothbrush lying on the floor next to him. He made a surprisingly swift recovery, and got on with his life pretty much as before; except for two small things.

He doesn't date any more. And he has *terrible* breath.

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