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Sitting on the subway, minding my own business, and this man opens his coat, exposing himself to me. What do I care? It's just a piece of human flesh. I'm more worried about bombs. He smiles a toothless grin, but I look away, not wanting to encourage him. Then, I remember this morning, combing my hair...three of the comb's teeth suddenly broke. I looked at the comb, thinking: What good is a toothless comb? I'd throw it away but I don't have another one. Put it on my list of things to do: buy comb. But when I'm on the subway, I can't help thinking that this all means something. Don't get me wrong, I'm not superstitious, just wondering.

My sister has a big dictionary sitting on a music stand, always open to a random couple of pages. She pointed out to me that no matter which two pages stand open, there's always something related in the little pictures in the margins. Maybe all the objects are round, maybe they all point in the same way. So, the toothless comb and the toothless man must be something like that.

Anyway, I'm going to take a walk in the park. I know I should be working, but it's such a lovely day. Down by the fountain, I sit for a while, watching people walk their dogs. Those small squat dogs with pushed in faces and teeth that protrude from their lower jaw over their upper lips. They're ugly and cute at the same time. The dogs do their business; the owners pick it up in little plastic bags. I sit in the sun for a little while longer. Then, I notice that the stairs that lead up from this fountain are broken. If you look at them at the right angle, you can imagine them as teeth and here it is again, that toothless grin.

Okay, what's going on here? My teeth are beginning to ache and I can wiggle at least two of them with my tongue. I better call the dentist.

I leave the park and walk along Fifth Avenue, looking in the shop windows at all the expensive clothes. I go into Barney's to use the ladies' room. When I open the zipper on my jeans, three of the teeth fall out. The zipper leers up at me with a toothless grin. I can't get it closed again, and I can't afford anything in this place, so I leave, casually holding my hands in front of my pants. I've buttoned them at the waist and I hope they don't fall down. So far, this has not been a good day.

I get on the subway, going downtown. I better go home and change my pants. Also, I'm hungry and it's time for lunch. When I get home, I open the front door with my key, but when I try to take the key out, it's stuck. I jiggle it,

pull on it, and finally it breaks in half. I'm almost in tears now. What else can go wrong? I call a locksmith, change my pants and make myself a tuna sandwich.

I'm holding my toothless comb, fingering the space where the teeth have fallen out, when the doorbell rings. The guy who comes to my door is probably the largest man I've ever seen. He must be 7 feet tall and weigh 300 pounds. He has a booming voice, very deep and musical. I can't help commenting on his voice. He tells me that he does voice-overs and radio advertising, but he can't make enough money doing that, so he's a locksmith. Then, he begins to examine the lock and the part of the key that's stuck inside.

'I'll have to change the lock,' he says, in that enormous voice of his. 'And I'm afraid it will cost you.'

'What can I do?' I say, my voice going up an octave in frustration, 'I'm stuck with this broken lock and I've already had the worst day. Go ahead, what do I care?'

He goes to work on the lock. I stare at the comb in my hand. I'm going back to China. If you see a toothless old man begging on the street, you know that someone knocked out his teeth so he'll be a more sympathetic beggar. You see them everywhere in the cities, men with twisted broken limbs. These cripples are made-cripples. I hear they make a lot of money and send it back to Anhui Province which is one of the poorest places in China. It's known as the Province of the Beggars. Anhui is also famous for its beautiful old architecture, buildings with carved roof tiles, beams gracefully curving up in the corners. So, that's how it is. Beauty grinning its toothless grin and someone cracking and twisting bones.

Just before he's leaving, the locksmith hands me the old lock with part of the key stuck inside. His hand is large so that the lock and key seem dwarfed inside it.

'I think some of the teeth on the key must have broken,' he says.

'I'm sure they have,' I reply.

And I am sure, since this is the day of the toothless grin. Don't get me wrong. It doesn't mean anything. Who knows, maybe everything has teeth, maybe everything is just what it is.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ellen Zweig.*