

Apartment 6E (Eden)

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A heavy, brown, metal door, covered in several layers of paint that proudly, albeit exhaustingly, signal the length of service to our apartment - as the rings of a tree do - is the first encounter one has with our home: Apartment 6E. This is a starter apartment. No, this is not the place for couples with sensible jobs and money put away for rainy days and plans for a future full of lifting children up while lying on a shag carpet. Those places are more expensive, and frankly, for a few twenty-three year-olds freshly out of college, those places are bland and unexciting. This is my first apartment, and I love it. I love that it is in an area that none of our friends will make the effort to come to - the Financial District. This provides an escape from dinner parties full of friends of friends of friends of friends, from unbearable late-night escapades that destroy the next day's schedule, from ex-lovers, of which there were few, however New York, no matter how big it may seem, picks and chooses which days it likes to resemble your hometown main street. I love the Financial District itself, full of rich men in business suits and those who serve them at fast-casual lunch spots. I feel as distant from my fellow man on the streets of my neighborhood as I would've weaving through dirt roads in Mumbai or bazaars in Turkey.

The apartment itself, as can be identified from its number, lies on the sixth floor. It's high enough up that I am shielded from the honks and buzzes of the street below but not so high that I spend a frustrating amount of time waiting for elevators and climbing stairs. I don't know many of my neighbors, and I think it would be nice if I did, however New Yorkers have learned to treat their neighbors like ghosts; exchanging wide-eyed stares as they pass in the hallway and, if they are unlucky enough to make eye contact, immediately diverting their gaze to a phone, the elevator buttons, a ceiling, really anything to avoid a connection with humans that eat and sleep and love just feet away from them.

There are two elevators sitting in the lobby and only one of them works (which one it is is always alternating). Often on the ride up to our precious sixth floor, you'll find vomit or beer or any other odd liquid or substance you can think of on the floor of the cabin. On the walls there are small tags of graffiti, which I have always enjoyed not for their artistic symbolism but for their ability to keep the rents down. I can never read what they are saying and for that reason I always question their purpose. Maybe I'm not hip to the graffiti game. The buttons to the elevator are black and give no indication as to whether they registered that they had been pushed as the lights behind the dashboard are broken. Of all the girls I ever bedded, none are as fickle as this silly elevator, which often dispels you on the fourteenth floor if it isn't in the mood to take requests that day. The walls of the elevator are covered in cheap marble wallpaper in an attempt to resemble something you might find in a building in Soho or the West Village, where residents use the elevators to transport fine pieces of art and pomeranians, instead of drunk kids smoking cigarettes in enclosed spaces.

Upon entering, guests are greeted with a hallway of a place. No, this apartment is not comfortable. It is not homey and it is not ripe for hosting and should any of us decide to take on a hobby; exercise or woodworking or the like; the apartment would kindly reject our request. It is a dump, but our names are on the lease. It's *ours*. The broken shoe rack just inside the entrance that supports shoes on only two of its four levels, that's *ours*. The massive, welcoming windows that line every wall of the living room... those are *our* windows. We're kids and we've never owned anything. We work cushy business jobs and we're treated like dogs and we come home depressed and wondering if this city has us between thumb and forefinger, waiting for a signal

to squash us like grapes, and then we walk through that door and remember that we have a place in this world and, like a politician with a low approval rating, we can still find the courage to hold our heads high and turn this thing around. New York City is a devastating place. Millions dream of seeing it; feeling like lab rats in Times Square with all the world's lights beaming upon them, riding carousels in Central Park while bathed in a sea of green that is bathing in a much, much larger sea of glass, concrete, and cigarette butts, standing on top of the Empire State building and deciding that no natural mountain compares to that one, that man-made one, that monument to the ingenuity of man and the results of his millennia-long efforts to build a better society. People around the world look upon New York City as a totem of modern mankind... and I was there. On one side of my heavy, brown, metal door, was that mystifying land of opportunity and on the other, was my little Apartment 6E.

Inside 6E, everything had either been bought second-hand, made from scratch, or found on the street. It gave the place a disjointed feel, like a bicycle assembled from parts spanning decades. At the deepest part of the living room, both walls could be touched by my outstretched arms. I did that often; on gray, pluvial days when I was home alone, I reached out and placed my flat palms on either side the way a mother may caress the face of a newborn. The windows were large and were the only truly redeeming entity of our cell. They were nearly ten feet tall and about three feet wide, and they let in whatever minuscule light could be let in as our apartment faced another building, separated by a chasm that emitted a gaseous scent. On sunny days, we can muster just enough light to populate the room and remind us that the walls and the ceiling fan were all still there. On rainy days, the place may as well be night, and I often fall victim to this, waking up at odd hours late in the day with no sense of which direction is north. On snowy days, the place lights up like a stage set and the no-sound sound of snow fills the apartment, bashing its silent cymbals and rattling its noiseless snare drum and alerting you to its presence before you ever actually see it.

The centerpiece of the home is the couch. The couch is brown. It is made of leather. Stiff leather. Leather so stiff that it practically rejects you when you try to sit on it. We found our stiff, brown, leather couch on the sidewalk outside of our old apartment in the North End of Boston. It was a sweaty June afternoon and it was love at first sight. The couch was in the form of an L and we didn't bother hauling it up to our Boston apartment because we knew it belonged in New York. So instead, we followed it here. It belonged in New York because it was stubborn, dirty, and proud as hell. It is the cathedral of our apartment. There is no dinner table in this home, nor is there a cozy family room or backyard patio. Everything happens on the couch. We eat all of our meals on the couch, huddled around a coffee table while our knees graze each other with every bite. We party on the couch, stuffing as many people as we possibly can onto it (the current record is six) while we chug beers and remember when we were all in middle school together and got kicked out of class for drawing a butt on the map around "Djibouti," and when we built igloos in the courtyard, diving through the snow in our blazers and ties, and when we didn't have jobs and insurance and groceries and any of that, we just had each other and freezing Massachusetts nights and girls who rejected us constantly and the stupidity to assume all of that adult stuff our parents endure would never apply to us. We cry on that couch, three grown men who recognized that the world is hard and unforgiving, that family doesn't stay with us forever and that bills needed to be paid and it was OK to hate it. I'll assume that in ten years, the couch will be as sacred to me as Djibouti City (capital of Djibouti).

Opposite the couch is the TV, which is mounted on a window frame and hanging on for dear life. Next to it is a mirror, where neighbors can see us selflessly check ourselves out. Underneath the mirror is a bar cart, featuring a cocktail shaker and a book with cocktail recipes (neither have ever been used). The coffee table is the commander of the room, sitting in between everything, covered in cigarette ash and video game controllers and food residue. It's the newest item here and it came from a company called (Name Redacted, Awaiting Sponsorship). It sits upon a carpet which is also covered in cigarette ash, video game controllers, and food residue, as well as dirt, dust, beer, wine, lint, hair, and candle wax. It takes a lot of gumption to reside in Apartment 6E, and the furniture may have more of it than we do.

Perpendicular to all of this is the kitchen. It can fit exactly one person and features four greasy stove top burners, an oven that has not once worked since we moved in, and a sink that, surprisingly, we make sure to keep spotlessly clean. This is where we cook meals. They consist of the following ingredients: chicken, beef, rice, potatoes, eggs. We always talk about learning how to add a little flavor to our lives, but then we come home and look at this puny little kitchen and feel pity for it. So we continue to cook our jailhouse meals and pretend we are content with them for fear of offending our poor kitchen.

In my eyes this is what Apartment 6E will always look like, and more importantly, always feel like. The way I came inside after crafting snowmen with the neighbors when I was nine and found my mother waiting for me, peeling mittens and boots and my hat off, I feel that here. When the car pulled into the driveway after the six-hour road trip to Quebec to visit Grandma when she was dying and I didn't quite understand what death meant at the time but I was being carried inside by my dad at midnight and I knew that felt right... I feel that here, too. We're older now, but this place manages to make me feel like a kid. It's like home... in some ways, even more so.

Or rather, it was home. It's empty now. The heavy, brown, metal door remains, but the the organs of this lifeform had been gutted, many of which were sitting in a moving truck on the curb right now. The carpet was gone; it had been rolled up and sent to a cleaner. I was excited to restore its original color, but I was going to miss its dirt and dust and beer and wine and lint and hair and candle wax. The TV had been pulled off the wall. I kissed a girl I loved for the first time while watching an old cop movie on that thing, and she dumped me four months later while watching an old firefighter movie on that thing, but it was gone now, in the truck and going to Flatbush with one of the roommates. The dusty mirror was also on its way to Flatbush. Roommate #3 laid claim to the coffee table and the bar cart, insisting he'd use it at his new place in the Upper West Side.

The cathedral was going to no one. It had broken apart during disassembly and was now in a rusty green dumpster behind the building.

The three of us gave each other hugs on the sidewalk on the morning of July 1st. We insisted, repeatedly, that even though we didn't live together anymore, we would still see one another constantly and even made plans to get drinks the following Tuesday. We looked at each other uneasily, the way guilty school children do when they're silently urging the other not to fess up. Sure enough, that Tuesday would pass and there would be no drinks.

I was off to Williamsburg. I had found two new roommates and they seemed like fine fellows. One worked for the city's mortuary service and the other was in banking. I'm sure we'd

create some wonderful memories together and have an equally amicable split in one year's time.

Nothing beats your first, though. Your first love, your first car, your first slice of Joe's. The last item to pack up when we cleared our things yesterday was the mini fridge, which sat lamely on the ground just outside the bathroom door. I picked it up and found a dead rat underneath. I thought there was no more fitting way to close my time in Apartment 6E.

My first.

And if you, dear stranger, are reading this right now from Apartment 6E, I hope you, too, find Eden in that dingy little cave, that sanctuary of crap, that comfortable nook, far out of reach from the hostility of the universe.

And I hope you've picked up that dead rat by now.