

# Dental Restoration

”Aaand ... spit.”

There was quite a storm going on outside. The wind was howling and blowing paper and branches from the park’s trees down the street, and the windows in the small dentist’s office were rattling loudly, like a drum set forgot to take its Ritalin.

11-year-old Sarah Grayman sat up and let a big drop of salvia fall from her mouth and into the small bowl next to the chair she was positioned in. She watched eagerly as it flowed down the drain and disappeared. Clara, the dentist, finished packing up her equipment before turning to the girl.

“All right, remember Sarah, no food for the next three hours, and absolutely no candy for the rest of the week, lest all your teeth fall out of your pretty little face,” she said.

Sarah nodded, but Clara was quite certain that the child would be stuffing her face with marshmallows and bubblegum before half an hour had passed. It wasn’t a coincidence that Sarah had a new appointment every month.

Clara watched the girl skip out the room and waited until she could hear the front door closing before she peered out the window with a sigh. Only a few people could be seen out on the street, clutching their jackets close to their bodies and fleeing from the storm. As a dark silhouette against the gray sky, the town hall with the clock on the large tower stood brooding over the city line.

The secretary announced that the next patient had just arrived. Clara thought this a little odd, considering she was not expecting anyone.

Even odder, the patient walking in the door was a full-grown man.

“Hello,” the man gave her an uncertain smile, “I hope you’re not too busy.”

“I’m not,” Clara stifled a laugh, “but aren’t you a little old to be seeing a children’s dentist?”

The man paused for a second, “I might be younger than I look.”

“How old are you?” Clara asked.

“Twenty-seven.”

Fifteen years younger than her. Suddenly Clara was all too aware of her age. It wasn’t quite as noticeable when she spent most of her time around children.

“I still don’t think that qualifies you as a kid,” she remarked, “But very well, I’ll take a look at you. What’s your name?”

“Jonathan Cooper,” the man took off his jacket and followed Clara through the hallway, “Thank you. I’m not from around here, and this was the only dentist I could find. My teeth have been aching horribly for days now ...”

“Did you move here recently? Please sit,” she pointed him towards the dentist chair.

“I’m here on business.”

“Ah,” with quick, habitual movements she got out her instruments, “Say, ‘ah’”

Jonathan gaped up, allowing Clara to peer inside. Two straight rows of teeth stared back at her.

“I don’t see anything that could cause pain,” she said “Which tooth did you say it was?”

He gave an unintelligible mumble.

“I don’t think—“ she started, but was interrupted by her phone ringing, “Hold on.”

Quickly she tore the rubber gloves from her hand, went to her bag and fumbled for the phone that kept screaming at her with the voice of Mozart’s *Serenata Notturna*. Finally she got a hold of it.

“Hello? ... No, I haven’t ... Yes, I know. But couldn’t you pick them up for once—No, I realize that ... You always do ...” She gave Jonathan a nervous smile and raised her finger to signal that it would be only a moment. It probably wasn’t as reassuring as hoped, as she could feel her voice becoming more and more strained and annoyed, “Yes ... No ... Listen, I can’t discuss this right now, I have a patient ... Fine. Bye.”

She put down the phone and hesitated for a moment before putting on new gloves and returning to Jonathan’s mouth. The sight almost made her gasp. A thick layer of grime and filth covered the teeth, emitting a horrible stench. How did she not notice this before?

“I ... I think I found the source of your pain, Mr. Cooper.”

As she reached for her equipment, Jonathan said; “Who were you talking to? If you don’t mind me asking. It sounded like you had some sort of disagreement.”

“My husband. Sorry,” she added when Jonathan flinched as she started cleaning his teeth with rough movements, “He wanted me to pick up our children from school because he had a meeting, but I’m as busy as he is later today. He doesn’t seem to care. We’ve had a lot of fights recently.”

Jonathan obediently kept his head still and let Clara do her work, but still he looked at her with friendly, attentive eyes.

“We have three kids – A pair of ten-year-old twins and an eighteen-year-old daughter. She dropped out of college a few months ago because of her bad grades and recently moved back home. I wanted to discipline her, you know, have some good, serious talks with her. But my husband goes ahead and buys her a new car. It’s almost as if – no, it’s *exactly* as if he wants to reward her neglecting her education.”

She paused to concentrate on a particularly dirty tooth before switching to a new tool.

Jonathan used the occasion to say, "I'm sorry."

"That's not even all," Clara continued, "Just the other day I found out that he has been lying to his mother about what I do for a living. Apparently he told her that I was a 'real doctor' and not a dentist. Since when is a dentist not a real doctor? I went to medical school for ? years, for God's sake!"

She wasn't sure how it happened, but as Clara cleaned up Jonathan's amazingly horrible teeth, she also unloaded every single thing that had been bothering her for the last twenty years. Everything from her husband not respecting her and fights with her daughter to nagging from her mother and problems with the twins being bullied. And for each tooth that turned clean and white, her chest felt a little lighter.

"Okay, I think that was all, Mr. Cooper," she finally whispered and glanced at the clock outside the window. They had been there for hours.

"Thank you very much, doctor," Jonathan got up and licked his teeth thoughtfully, "I feel much better now."

Routinely Clara cleaned up her equipment, lectured Jonathan on taking better care of his dental hygiene, provided him a free sample of floss and walked him to the door. Once in the hallway, she politely shook his hand and said goodbye.

And for a fleeting moment, she had an almost irresistible urge to say, "I just have to check on your teeth one last time," and then put her hands on his shoulders, lean forward, and kiss him.

But she didn't.

"Goodbye," Jonathan said, opened the door and went outside where a bright blue sky greeted him, "Oh, it seems the storm has cleared up."

"Yes," Clara said, "Yes, it has."