

PORLE JOEN

# The Dentist

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# the Dentist

It was not an extraordinary day. The books were sparsely filled with appointments allowing an adequate days earnings. He liked it that way. He was not in need of the finest clothes, a mansion or a fancy car – his little Ford Festiva was functional.

He much enjoyed these lazy days. Rushing only made his stressed. The last time he had a rushed day, he almost pulled a perfectly healthy adult tooth out of the mouth of a twelve-year-old boy. His focus and nerves definitely liked these lazy days. Yes, it was much safer for all involved.

Today, there were only five appointments on the books. The first two were simple routine cleans and the third was a rather minuscule filling. Minuscule, yet painful. Not painful for the patient, indeed, she would not have been able to feel a thing. Dr Roberts knew that, yet, the young lady whined, cried and screamed as if he was pulling a molar without anaesthetic. She did not even require numbing, the damage was a superficial surface chip, nowhere near any nerves. Still,, he remained patient and gave her a very low dosage of gas to calm her rather than ease the pain. Her adrenalin was high and the gas had little effect but he was not the kind of doctor who administers stronger drugs just to appease a psycho systematic dentistry fear. If he did that, most of his patients would be knocked out.

Indeed, the girl had brushed his nerves but it was quick and the young lady left with a glowing smile. Now, it was past mid-day and his next appointment was not for another two hours. Ivan decided a stretch was in order. He would take a stroll and find a lovely cafe at which he could enjoy his lunch. He would sit in the calming breeze of the open and enjoy all that life offers. It would be perfect and restful and exactly what the Doctor ordered.

Ivan washed his hands with disinfectant, and washed them again. His line of work had presented him with a mild though rather annoying case of germ phobia. It was nothing he could not handle yet he greatly despised the multitude of elderly people who visited him. They came for the comfort and the bedside manner but all he saw were old, rotting, gnarled and stained teeth and gums wanting to expel their halitosis as he forced himself to have a closer expectation of their festering mouths.

As a shiver ran along his spine, he wondered if perhaps he should consider a new line of work. He laughed aloud to himself; how ridiculous. At sixty-seven, what was he going to do? Start a carpentry apprenticeship? Over forty years of dentistry had provided all he needed and more, he had a nice nest egg and retirement was definitely a safe and considerable option. Yes, it was definitely an option. Quite a damn good one really. He pulled up the appointments file on his laptop. It was linked to the front desk computer where Sara was always vigilant about keeping his schedule up to the minute. He looked forward in time. Appointments were randomly dotted throughout the coming weeks. He clicked into the following month. Sixteen appointments booked already. He sighed. He clicked ahead another three months and found three pre-booked appointments. He sighed heavier. Six months into the future...

“Who the hell books 6 months ahead?” Well, looked like retirement was out for at least another six months. It was only one appointment but Ivan had only ever missed three appointments in his entire career, he prided himself on reliability. Three appointments... when his beloved Cheryl passed. He shook the thought away before he could dwell. And that was his reason to keep working. In the two years since she passed, he had not allowed

himself to fall into the deep darkness of grief that he could feel playing with the edges of his mind. He knew that over time, if he held it at bay long enough, it would dissipate. It had not done so yet. He would work until it had. It was settled. He would never retire.

He flicked back to today's appointments to reconfirm what time Charlie would be in. Ivan liked Charlie, he had exemplary hygiene for a gentleman in his fifties. Charlie had all his original teeth and not a single oral disease or infection in the twenty years Ivan had been seeing him. Excellent. Another simple clean, good old Charlie. Ivan smiled with the knowledge that his afternoon would be relaxed and enjoyable.

Ivan clicked the intercom to reception.

"Sara, I'm heading out to lunch. Would you like me to bring you back anything my dear?" He picked up his coat.

"Oh, ahhh. Hang on," Sara said through the intercom. That was odd. Sara was usually highly professional and rarely sounded so absent. The door to his office opened. Sarah looked concerned. She closed the door behind her and leaned against it. She was a gorgeous girl, in her early thirties. Ivan had dreamed of her in a way he should not. It was just a dream though, he had no control over his subconscious thoughts or desires. No, not a desire.

"Ivan, a young man just presented with a rather urgent broken tooth." Oh great, so much for his relaxing lunch. Sara's face was unusual. She seemed pallid and somewhat disturbed. Ivan became worried. She knew his aversion to dental disgust and his first thought was that this young man was going to push his limits. A 'young man' with an urgent broken tooth could mean three things. Either the boy was in a fight and had broken it on a fist, or his lack of hygiene has left his mouth slowly ridding itself of those pesky pearly whites, or he was a drug addict with broken down teeth and a mentality to match. He hoped it was a fight – blood, he could handle.

"Let me guess, another fight in town. Should I expect another boy to arrive shortly?"

"No Ivan, no fight." Damn! Sara was holding her cards close to her chest. She was giving nothing away and that did nothing to alleviate his concerns. She stared at him. It was unexpected and unusual.

"What is it, Sara? What's wrong?" She shook her head slowly. It must be bad. Definitely a drug addict. "OK, is he in a lot of pain?"

"No, none," Sara said. She was not making this any easier. No pain. Strange. Normally the drug addicts and hygiene haters would not come to him until their pain was unbearable. But no pain was good. The surgery had a general rule that drop-ins would only be seen in cases of emergency and extreme pain. Perhaps he could see this boy another day. Sara knew that and it annoyed him a little that she had not already booked an appointment for the boy. It annoyed him and worried him. She was usually very efficient.

"If he is not in pain, can't he book in for an appointment?" Sarah shook her head. "Sara, why not?"

"Because he hasn't been able to eat anything solid for over a week and he is hungry."

The boy must be in pain. Why else would he not be able to eat? Sara was not making any sense. He put his coat down.

"Send him through." Sara nodded slowly and made a quick escape out the door. 'Maybe she needs a day off' he thought to himself. Perhaps he had not been paying close enough attention to the poor girl. She works hard.

He sat down at the laptop and tapped in his password to access the patient information screen. Very strange, Sara had not entered the boy's details. He hit the intercom again.

"Sara, can you please enter the patient's details."

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