

## The Dentist's

By Hala Dika

The waiting room at the Dellner School of Dentistry was full of people who had given up the ghost. They sat there waiting to be acted upon. The corner-mounted flat-screen pontificating tragedy with such condescension as to make the spectators believe in their own inability to distinguish fact from fiction. Sitting there they were not even aware of their powerlessness to fight against acquiescence. For is it not acquiescence to sit in silence under the drill accepting pain out of fear to scream?

One by one they are called and one by one they file in, eager, smiling, with the very teeth they will lose. And there I sat in the same waiting room observing and thinking of all this, yet as helpless as they. My only recourse, anger and willful belligerence.

My student dentist, younger and a foot shorter than I calls my name and I rise. He is unfathomably chipper, "Hi!"

"Hi."

"How are you?"

"Fine, you?"

"Good."

"Excellent." Now I get defensive, "And what kind of pain will you be inflicting on me today?" He laughs, amused, as if I were a poodle who had just jumped through a hoop.

“Oh come on. It’s not as bad as all that.”

“It is actually.”

“You don’t like coming here do you?”

“No. No offense doc but nobody in their right mind likes coming to the dentist.” He is actually hurt by this, which *I* find amusing.

“Well if you took good care of your teeth...”

“Typical dentist answer.” Now he decides to ignore the obvious and begin the procedure, “Well, alright then, let’s get you to a chair.”

He gets me to a chair. It is in an open space consisting of small sectioned off areas rather than rooms. All of its victims are in full view of each other, tiny, insignificant experiments for the student body, learning from their circling mentors the art of settling the souls that must be dissociated from the teeth.

The amiability ends where the process begins, takes over, possesses like demons each shiny instrument. To lay back and open one’s mouth is an act of utter submission, dangerously passive, like winding down a dark staircase, sensing danger, repulsed and yet exhilarated by the loss of control. If only Hitchcock saw the potential.

Oh the scrape of metal on bone! You wince, you jolt, you moan, but you stay, allowing yourself to be despairingly uncomfortable. But it is law. It is convention. It is tradition. It is routine. It is every 6 months. You are unaware of the origin of the tradition for you have been led to each appointment by the concerned face of a mother. Therefore, because you are not aware of its origin you do not question its necessity. The knowledge of the machinery, the instrumentation is not yours to

analyze. And as it becomes consecutive, habitual, you take comfort in being helpless, and like a child being sung a lullaby, you trust, believe, and accept your fate.

I lay back in the chair thinking of all of this as my young, handsome, and courteous student dentist prepares a 6-inch syringe..."This will numb your pain." I feel the sting, but am used to it by now. I know what it will feel like. I know what it will taste like, and I know the right side of my cheek will get heavy and almost droop to the ground in my imagination. Now the start up of the drill. It has a character of its own, a villain in its own right, made even more lethal by its doctor's grip. Oh the uses of electricity, Dr. Frankenstein would be amazed. It is difficult for doctors to go from cadavers to flesh and blood. But then again, in the school of dentistry I *am* the cadaver.

20 minutes pass and the procedure is over...*it wasn't so bad was it?* My student sadist leads me to the billing station where I am to pay for this recent violence, shakes my hand and walks off, happy with himself for another successful completion, a check off the list...another satisfied customer.

I walk out to my car still numb in the cheek and roll myself a cigarette, smoke and try to release myself from the procedure, and return to a world I believe I am in control of.