



toothless...

Toothless

By Adam Dachis

It was a lazy Sunday afternoon. Mitome put his camera on the bathroom sink and went into the living room. “Grandmother, I can’t find your teeth.”

Grandmother laughed. “Why you want them?” she said. Her lips were oily and she smiled like a whale. Her remaining teeth were so narrow she could have jammed a white hairbrush in her mouth and no one would have noticed the bristles weren’t natural.

“Just...where are they?” Mitome said.

“Why?”

“I just want to see them.”

“No, you do sneaky things.”

Two years ago, when Mitome was ten, Mitome stole Grandmother’s lemon-colored razor. Mama had asked him moments earlier, “have you been shaving your testicles?”

“No,” said Mitome. “What’s there to shave?”

“I found pubic hair behind the toilet.”

Mitome was the man of the house and made demands: “No, I just want to see your teeth. Where are they?”

“You getting ready for Halloween?”

“Where are they?”

“They’re in my bag.”

“Why?”

“Because they hurt and I only wear them on special occasions. I put them in before I see company but sometimes I forget so I keep them wrapped up in tissues.”

“Can I see them?”

“No,” Grandmother said. “Why you need them?”

“I just want to take pictures.”

“Why? To show your friends?”

“But, just let me see your teeth.”

“No, you are weird boy.”

Once a long while ago, Mama put him on a stool and had “the talk.”

“First of all,” she said, “there is no Santa Claus. Even your father couldn’t come and go that fast.”

Mitome nodded in familiarity.

“Second of all, Father Time isn’t real. Do you really believe anyone is older than Grandmother?”

Mitome shook his head no.

“Third of all, there is no such thing as Mother Nature. Nobody’s vagina is that big.”

Mitome laughed.

“Vaginas aren’t funny, Mitome-kun—and fourth of all, the Easter Bunny is just a man dressed in a bunny suit. Do you remember what kind of men dress in animal suits?”

“Pedophiles,” Mitome said.

“Fifth, finally, and most importantly,” Mama said, “the tooth fairy wants you to think that selling your body for money is okay. It’s not.”

Mitome’s mind became warped and insulated as a result.

Mitome followed Grandmother into the kitchen and asked her to make One Minute Potatoes.

“Eat the leftovers.”

“They taste like rice.” Mitome wanted something fresh and he knew “One Minute Potatoes” was a bit of a misnomer.

“You are spoiled boy,” Grandmother said, as she grabbed the wooden spoon and the box. “You listen to story.”

“Why?”

“Because I tell it.”

“But I have to pee.”

“Use the toilet. When you done, I tell it.”

Instead Mitome’s hand was deep inside Grandma’s bag, fishing for a tissue with teeth inside. When he found the package, he unraveled it quickly. The teeth fell and scattered like Tic-Tacs under the couch.

“What you doing?” Grandmother said from the doorway.

“Nothing.” A large armchair obscured Grandmother’s handbag.

“No, you do sneaky things. Come here.”

Mitome nodded and joined Grandmother in the kitchen. He sat down at the table in front of a large bowl with a tablespoon of butter inside.

“Potatoes in one minute,” Grandmother said. “First, I tell you story.”

Mitome pushed the bowl out of head’s way as he prepared to sleep over the kitchen table.

“There is rumor that Buddhist priest rose suddenly from sick bed from coma and found infant in the hospital twelve years ago. He hold it close to his belly to transfer his power to it.” Grandmother slopped a mound of One Minute Potatoes into Mitome’s bowl.

“Thanks.”

“Because child was unharmed, the hospital kept it secret but the story has been passed many times through the halls of hospital. In the folklore, it said it take thirty days for the soul to attach to the child. You know why I tell you this?”

“No,” Mitome said with a hunk of potatoes falling over his lips.

“Your Mama tells me this story. She learn it in hospital when you born.”

“Why?”

“People think this make child crazy and do sneaky things from family.”

Mitome wiped away the potatoes. “I do not do sneaky things!”

“There is good news. If the child pray, the monastery believe the child would see the face of God and change forever.”

“Oh, I forgot,” Mama said. “Sixth of all, God is a douche.”

“Mitome,” Grandmother said, “Devil is all around us. If you take my teeth, the devil eats your soul.”

Mitome waited until Grandmother was in bed the second time. The first time she slept in her room. After two hours she overheated and moved onto the porch after a fresh snack of peaches and vanilla yogurt. Mitome turned on his flashlight and reached a skinny arm beneath the couch. He plucked all four of the little white objects out of the dust and put them on the carpet beside him along with money someone lost in the indefinite past. Mitome gripped the teeth in his right hand while trying to brush off his arm, littered with skin flakes and dried mucus, on a nearby cushion.

Running on his toes into the bathroom, Mitome placed the teeth atop the toilet tank. He grabbed his camera from the sink and switched it on. Swift yet poised, Mitome set off a flash, allowing the camera only a memory of the great burst of white light—he’d overexposed the photograph. Mitome looked at the digital screen. Disappointed, he hurried back to his room to collect a stack of books to feign a tripod. He deferred literature like *Harold and the Purple Crayon* for thicker, and perhaps more hollow, Michael Crichton novels. Mitome, however, stopped taut in the doorway on his way back to the bathroom. He slowly lowered himself to his heels and sighed. Behind him was another great burst of white light. Mama was home.

Mitome remembered a story Mama once told him.

“I almost became a model,” she said. “You and I both—we’re very attractive. When you grow up you’ll have lots of girlfriends.”

“Not just one?”

“If that’s what you want.”

“Grandma says you get the STDs from too much coochie.”

“No matter what your Grandmother tells you, you do as you feel in your heart.”

Mama put her hand to Mitome’s chest and smiled. Her teeth were more thick than narrow. “Grandmother would not let me model, dance, or photograph, and now I work at the hospital instead. She said I would ‘take the drugs and have the sex’.”

Mitome laughed.

“But Mitome,” Mama said, “you know better. You’ll marry a nice woman—a *woman*, and work how you want to. And you won’t do drugs.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t listen to your Grandmother. Make your own decisions.”

The lights faded and Mitome heard the car door open and shut in the driveway. He spilled the books onto the bathroom tile and ran to the front door.

“Mitome!” Mama said. “It’s a school night.”

Grandmother moaned. “Go to sleep.”

Mitome pulled his Mama into the bathroom. “I stole Grandmother’s teeth.”

“Why?”

“To take pictures.”

“She wouldn’t let you see them?”

“She said I do ‘sneaky things’.”

Mama messed Mitome’s hairdo and walked to the patio. “Mom,” she said. “Sorry I woke you. I had quite a night.”

Mitome smiled and stacked the books. He placed the camera on top and turned off the flash. He dialed the camera to the manual setting and held the exposure for one second. The picture looked nicer this time. No more blank white—just teeth on a toilet tank.

Mama and Grandmother talked on the patio as Mitome held the teeth in his right hand and looked down at Grandmother’s bag. After staring to the moment where anyone would have to wonder if his feet were stuck to the floor, Mitome ran back to his room and slipped into bed.

The next morning, Mitome wrapped the teeth in a tissue and hid them in his lunch box along with the printed picture. Grandmother had prepared a fish sandwich with peanut butter, mayonnaise and lettuce the night before. Mitome waited outside in the snowstorm because it was March and he needed to take the bus. He attended a Jewish Day School because the teachers were better than public school and the prices were lower because of religion. However, the school had very little money, the way most schools suffer, and the city could only surrender a shared Special Education bus. All seats were

assigned so nobody was lost and yet in all the supposed order, the mentally disabled child seated beside mentally proficient Mitome, who could seemingly do nothing other than spastically gyrate, often inadvertently struck him in the head with no consequential action from the supervisor. Occasionally, he'd think that tolerance meant too much. Sometimes Mitome's teacher asked him, "is there trouble at home?" and he never knew how to answer.

After Animal Science, Local History, and Talmud in the 20th Century, Mr. Tzadaka led the children to the cafeteria.

"What do you have today?" Sarah asked.

"Fish, cole slaw, and teeth," Mitome said.

"You have teeth?"

"Everyone has teeth," said Hagar.

"They're Grandmother's teeth," said Mitome, "and I'll show you later."

When later happened half the class had shown and told. Mitome stood up with his lunch box and placed himself in front of the class. He opened it up and aligned each tooth as evenly as possible on the table.

"Mitome brought candy!" Yitzchak said.

"Yeah!" yelled some kid with glasses.

But Mitome brought teeth—his grandmother's teeth. He passed around the picture so everyone could see how each was different.

"For my science project," Mitome said, "I'm going to demonstrate the ill effects of drinking soda pop."

Mitome poured himself a glass of Coke and dropped each tooth in with a plop. The class watched closely and Mitome smiled as all the evidence melted away. When he arrived at home, Grandmother wore her best dress.

"I going to meet my friends," she said. "Where my teeth?"

Mitome looked at Grandmother with a certain delight. "They've gone with God."