

# Chompers

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My grandmother is dead, and all I want is her teeth, fake canines and incisors jutting perfectly out of plastic gums that attached to her back molars with curved silver wires.

Sitting in her small two bedroom house, on her once-white sofa with the once-yellow flowers, I am watching my cousins Mina and Christine, a few feet to the left of me, fight silently over an original “Little Mermaid” VHS.

Mina’s hair is brown and sways back and forth against her shoulders. My grandmother always said we looked like twins, but as her brow furrows at her sister, I don’t really see the resemblance.

They’re grasping the short ends of the VHS tape with their identically thin fingers, quietly pulling Ariel’s smiling face back and forth between them as they mumble things I can’t quite make out. Occasionally the VHS tape bumps into Christine’s pregnant belly making me wonder what it’s like to be a baby in the womb of such a vile person.

I don’t like my cousins.

They don’t like me either.

Behind me, in my grandmother’s kitchen, I can hear my aunt and my uncle rummaging through the cupboards for things they want, things they think they can sell. I can hear old cake tins, which my grandmother will never use to make my wedding cake, clattering against the brown and white linoleum tile.

My grandmother has been dead for four days.

I can’t seem to cry.

I just sit there, watching my cousins and all of the greed that hangs heavy in the house, trying to get up the nerve to ask them for what I want. I figure I’ll phrase it in a casual way when they’re distracted with something.

Something like, “So, yeah, you know Grandma’s teeth? I’d like those if you could get them for me.” And then I’d tag on something like, “I don’t really want anything else, you guys can have it all.”

I figure if they know it’s the only thing I want, they’ll be more inclined to hand them over without question.

Two hours ago they read my grandmother’s will. She gave me first pick at everything. I was her favorite. My extended family was not happy.

Now, I get to sit here while they show me things that they want, asking if I want it before they claim it. My aunt trudges into the room holding a copper bowl that belonged to my great grandmother.

“Do you want this?” she asks.

Her red hair and wide hips swing towards me as she speaks.

I shake my head. She sways happily back to the kitchen.

I always thought that when my grandmother died I’d want the 350 piece Wilton icing tip kit she’d had since 1949 that she used to teach me to decorate cakes, or the blue and white cameo broach she wore to brunch every Sunday, but it turned out that her teeth were the only thing I thought about when I was in Chicago Midway airport listening to my mother’s voice as she told me my grandmother, her mother-in-law, had finally succumbed to her Alzheimer’s.

My Grandmother took out her uncomfortable teeth everywhere. She’d take them out at fancy dinner parties, in grocery stores, department stores, and synagogue; even while driving, placing them on the gray dashboard of her Oldsmobile to grin happily at her unsuspecting passenger, who was usually me.

When my uncle comes in to ask me if I want her 1940’s KitchenAid mixer, I say suddenly and loudly, “I want Grandma’s teeth.”

My aunt sticks her head through the door of the kitchen, and in my peripheral vision her forehead and chin are pulled tight together in confusion.

“Why the hell would you want her teeth?” my uncle asks, his brown mustache curling towards his nose.

I look at my cousins, still fighting over the video tape, and the mixer in my Uncle’s hands.

“I don’t know,” I say with a shrug, “Why would anyone want that shit?” I point at all of them but none of them directly.

I get up from the couch, pulling on my coat, motioning to leave.

My aunt, suddenly in front of me, thrusts a red plastic case towards my face.

I open it up slowly, expecting joke snakes to jump out at me.

Inside my grandmother is smiling up at me.

It is then that the tears come.