

# **PAPAP'S TEETH**

**by Danielle DeVor**

Papap's Teeth  
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Many years ago now, roughly 1943, I had the most terrifying experience I've ever had in my entire life. Ironic, really, when you consider I was six years old at the time. But still, when the moon appears in the sky full and bright, I cannot help but think about it, or rather, them. The truth is I loved my grandfather very much. He was a tall man with white hair that tended to rise from his scalp in tufts. It was forever blowing around in the wind. His eyes were constantly crinkled as if smiling, but my grandfather wasn't always what he seemed. You see, my grandfather had this curious habit. Back then, men had a lot more style, and wore suits rather than the now common jeans and t-shirts. Like many men of the time, my grandfather carried things in his pockets. Now, most men would carry their wallets and keys, and if they were particularly religious and Catholic, they would carry a rosary. Not my grandfather, no. Instead of these normal objects, well, I'm sure he carried a wallet, but I digress. My grandfather had this unusual habit of pulling out this small wooden box from his breast pocket several times a day. He would open the little box, stare at it for a moment, and then close it up again and place it back in that pocket.

Now, the mind of a six-year-old is a curious thing, and I just couldn't help myself. I was compelled to know what was in that box. So, one afternoon when we were visiting him, I crawled up into his lap, as I was expected to do.

"Papap?" I asked.

"Yes, Sara." He answered with a look on his face that could only be described as a grandfather's joy. He brushed my long blond hair away from my eyes.

"What's that thing?"

He looked at me, completely puzzled. "What thing, honey?"

I looked up into his face wide-eyed. "What's this?" I asked as I felt on his chest for the little box.

Quickly, my grandfather pushed my hand away from his breast. "Sara, never you mind. Some things aren't meant for children to know."

Without providing anything further in terms of an explanation, he picked me up from his lap and set me gently on my feet. "Now, why don't you run on and play? Old Red would probably like a visit."

I did as I was told. Old Red was my grandfather's dog, and probably the nicest dog in the world. He was a beautiful Irish Setter that rarely barked. To me, he was the perfect dog, or at least I couldn't imagine a better dog at that age.

# # # # #

Time passed. Every week we visited my grandfather on Sundays, and every week I would play with his dog. As many times as I could, I would ask my grandfather about the little box. And every time I would get brushed away and told to go play with the dog.

One day, my father came home from work with some exciting news. Father was nothing like Grandfather: he was always a little stressed, his hair was always in place, his glasses always cleaned. Now, I would call him fussy; back then, he was just different. He had been selected by his boss to go to a convention in Albany, New York, that weekend, and he wanted Mother to go with him. They were both very excited until they remembered me.

"What are we going to do with Sara?" Mother asked. Mother, at that time, always wore smart dresses and heels. Even when doing housework. She had her blonde hair expertly coiffed each week at the local beauty parlor. And, she was always telling me to act like a lady, which I didn't appreciate very much.

Father thought for a moment. "I wonder what Dad's doing this weekend? Why don't I give him a call and see if he'd like a little extra company besides just Old Red?"

Father went over to our telephone and called Grandfather. The phone rang for several minutes. Finally, my grandfather answered. We could hear his tinny voice on the line through the phone.

"Hello?"

"Dad, it's James."

“Well, what a surprise. How’s the city?”

My father laughed. “It’s just like you always said, Dad. Too noisy, too dirty, and too many people.”

“So I take it nothing’s changed?”

My father laughed again. “No, Dad. But that’s not what I’m calling about. How would you like some company this weekend?”

My grandfather coughed. “Well, you all are always welcome, you know that.”

“No, Dad. I’m afraid this would just be Sara. Audrey and I are going up to Albany on Saturday. We’re staying the night at this fancy hotel. I got picked to go to that convention I was telling you about last week.”

My grandfather paused. “Well, when would you be coming back?”

“Oh, definitely Sunday morning. It’s just an overnight stay.”

“Shame they can’t give you an extra night with all the work you do for that company. Ah, well. Sara would of course be welcome. I’m sure Old Red would love the extra attention.”

“That’s great, Dad. We’ll bring Sara up early Saturday morning. I’d expect us around eight.”

“That’s just fine, son. Say hello to Sara and the missus for me.”

“Will do. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

My father hung up the phone and grabbed me into his arms for a hug. “You’ll be a good girl for Papap, won’t you?”

“Of course, Daddy.”

# # # # #

The following Saturday, my parents dropped me off with my grandfather. The day ended up being quite a bit of fun, if I remember correctly. My grandfather took me fishing, and that evening we fried our catch of the day in a pan. It was the first time I had ever eaten anything I had caught. Old Red even got some.

Later that evening, Grandfather helped me get ready for bed.

“So, Sara. Do you want to sleep with Papap, or on the floor with Old Red?”

I laughed. “But won’t you get lonely?”

He chuckled. “Well, honey it’s up to you. I have that old sleeping bag if you want to sleep on the floor.”

“No, Papap. I wanna sleep with you.” I said.

My grandfather gave me a kiss on the cheek, picked me up, and then tucked me into bed. “Sit tight, Sara. I’ll be back in a minute.”

I watched my grandfather go into the bathroom, and I heard him start brushing his teeth. I looked around the room, trying to find something of interest, when my eyes fell upon the little wooden box sitting on my Grandfather’s nightstand. I couldn’t help myself.

I pulled the covers away and crawled over to his side of the bed. I snatched the box from the nightstand and pulled it close to my chest. Carefully, I opened the box. Inside was something that looked like two long pointed teeth, but I didn’t know what they were. Somehow, they were alive. They writhed in the box like little worms. I screamed as loud as I could.

My Grandfather ran into the room and snatched the box from my hands. He, almost reverently closed it, and placed it back in its place on his nightstand. “You never should have been so curious, Sara.”

I shivered and stared at him with wide eyes.

“I told you that this wasn’t for your eyes, but you wouldn’t listen.” He sat down on the bed next to me and ran his hands through his thinning hair. “It can’t be helped now. You have to know the truth. If only, to save yourself.”

In all of my six years, I had never had an adult speak to me like that. My Grandfather pulled me into his arms.

“Sara, do you know what you saw?” He asked.

I shook my head.

“In that box is something that I’ve kept my eye on for years. You see, back when your grandmother and I were first married, God rest her soul, we were attacked on the way home to our apartment. It was a foul thing with hands of steel and breath from the foulest depths of hell. It bit your poor grandmother, it did. I had never seen any beast like it, but somehow, I knew what to do with it. I grabbed a piece of wood from a broken crate that was lying in the street and I stabbed it in the heart with it. The creature fell to the ground and writhed in pain. Finally, nothing was left but the skull of the infernal creature. It just seemed to turn to dust. I picked up the skull, and even that incapacitated, it tried to bite me. So I grabbed the damned thing by the eye-sockets and led your grandmother to the hospital. They patched your grandmother up all right, and nothing ever happened to her from the bite from that thing; guess it wasn’t venomous. But when I got home, I grabbed my pliers and ripped that damned thing’s bitin’ teeth right out of its skull. I stomped the damn skull when I was finished and threw it in the dumpster on Third Street.”

Grandfather wiped the tears away from my eyes.

“You know those darn teeth would still move and try to bite me? So I did some research on that thing — vampire, they call it. And I found out that they hate ash wood. So I had this little box made, and ever since, I’ve kept my eye on those teeth... So now you know.”

I was so shocked and scared by his story that I began to cry hysterically. There was nothing that he could do to calm me. Finally, I must have cried myself to sleep.

The next morning, my parents picked me up, but I refused to say another word to Grandfather. On the way home, they looked at me, and noticed that something just wasn’t right about me.

“Sara, did everything go all right at Papap’s?” My mother asked.

I shook my head.

“Well, honey, what’s wrong?” My father asked.

“I’m scared.”

My mother turned around in her seat. “Of what, honey? Did something happen?”

I nodded.

“Well, you can tell Mommy. What happened?”

“I’m scared.” I placed my hands over my eyes and began to cry.

“What are you scared of?” She asked.

I sobbed. “Papap’s teeth!”

“What?” My father asked.

“Papap’s teeth!” I wailed.

My parents looked at each other and just shrugged. They didn’t speak about it anymore. After that, Grandpa came to visit us on Sundays. Sometimes he would even bring Old Red. I never saw the little box again.

# # # # #

And then, today I received a call at the office. I stayed in the city, and now that women’s lib had opened a lot of doors, I had a nice job at an advertising agency. The Sixties really made a difference, and I was so glad that the Vietnam War was over. But this call was something I hadn’t expected.

Several months before, my grandfather died. My mother said that she’d call me after the reading of my grandfather’s will, so I was expecting a call, but not the one I had received.

“Miss Correy?” The voice asked.

“Yes, may I know who is calling?”

“I am Leonard Gruber, your grandfather’s lawyer. I need you to come by the office this afternoon and pick up your inheritance.”

“Wait. What?”

“Your inheritance, Miss Correy.”

“Well, I certainly wasn’t aware...”

“No, no, Miss Correy. It is just a little something. According to your grandfather, you would know how to handle your inheritance.”

I had no idea what this man was talking about, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to see what on earth had been left me. “Where is your office located?”

“Two-twenty-five West Thirty-fourth Street, suite one-oh-oh-six. What time may I expect you?”

“I'll be leaving the office at three; if the subway runs on time, I should be there before five.”

“I'll be waiting.”

# # # # #

Promptly at three, I left the office and managed the afternoon traffic to make it to the lawyer's office. Amazingly, it was a relatively easy trip, but for a few minor incidences on the subway. I arrived at the building shortly after four.

I entered the building and checked in at the front desk. I was told I was expected. After a few minutes, a nondescript man walked towards me. His balding hair was neatly trimmed and his suit fit decently.

“Mr. Gruber?” I asked.

The man warmly offered his hand. “This way, Miss Correy.”

I allowed him to take my elbow. He led me through a maze of hallways. Finally, we reached his office and he led me to a nice leather chair.

“I am so glad that you could take the time to come down here today. I know that your loss must be difficult. Your grandfather was a great man.”

I smiled. “Yes, he was.”

“I'll be back in one minute. I need to pull your inheritance from the safe.”

I was puzzled by that. I knew it couldn't have been money, because he would have just given me a check. I had no idea what this inheritance could be. The lawyer came back with an ornately wrapped silver box. He handed it to me gingerly.

“This, Miss Correy, is your inheritance. I just need you to sign this paper, and you can be on your way.”

“Do I need to open it here?” I asked.

“Not at all.” He grabbed a small stack of papers. “If I could get you to initial here. Here. Here. And sign here.”

I complied. He grabbed the sheaf of papers and stood at his desk, smiling.

“That will take care of everything, Miss Correy. I trust that you have a pleasant day.”

I shook his hand, placed the little box in my bag, and left. I hailed a cab, not wanting to risk the subway after dark. I was so nervous that I found it difficult to breathe until I was safely inside my apartment. I laid my bag on the sofa. Then, I shrugged off my coat and hung it on the hook just inside the door. I walked over to the sofa and sat down. I took a deep breath.

I grabbed my bag and pulled the little box out of it. Carefully, I pulled at the paper. When I saw a bit of wood, I dropped the box. My heart began hammering in my chest.

“It can't be.”

I picked the box back up off the floor and finished unwrapping it. Sitting there amongst the torn paper was the box I hadn't seen in over twenty years. It was older, and a little dirty, but I had no trouble recognizing it.

I took another deep breath. Surely they still weren't in there. I slowly opened the box, and there, in the bottom were the writhing teeth, just as I remembered. I jumped and dropped the box. The teeth fell out of the box and rolled underneath the sofa. I didn't wait to find out. I grabbed a few changes of clothes and left.

I didn't care about my things. I didn't care about the few months I had left on my lease. I checked into a hotel and the very next day, I withdrew my savings from the bank. I went to the landlord and paid off the rest of my lease. I never went back to that apartment. I'm sure the landlord was puzzled as to why I left everything as it was, but I never had to worry about it. I had left no forwarding address.

And then the deaths started. At first, I didn't realize that they were happening in my old building. There were small pieces in the paper about them, but nothing really struck me as familiar. Finally, I read about the death of my old landlord. That was when I knew that something had to be done. Had I known that the teeth were capable... No, that's a lie. I had felt it in my gut what they were capable of, and now it was up to me. I couldn't let the deaths continue.

I planned carefully. There was no way that I was going back to that apartment building at night, so I had to come up with a ruse. At work, I found a stack of fliers advertising a local cleaning company, and on my lunch break, I took myself and the fliers uptown to my old building.

When I reached the building, I could not believe how ominous the building looked. It was probably my imagination, but my heart began hammering and sweat began to run down the back of my neck. I entered the building, and the hallway was dimmer than I remembered. That bothered me too. I ran up the stairs to the top floor. I'm not sure what I was hoping, but it seemed logical at the time.

Just as I was about to slip a flier underneath the first door, I heard a scream coming from the floor below. I ran down the stairs so fast that I almost tripped, and when I reached the floor, everything had gone silent. I walked down the hallway, pausing by each door hoping to hear something, anything. But again, there was nothing.

And then, I reached the door at the end of the hall. I paused like I did at the others, but this one felt different. I had no explanation for it, but I could feel it. I looked down. There, wiggling its way out from under the door was one long bloodstained tooth. I took a step back. The other tooth came out from under the same door just like the first.

Suddenly, they moved forward so fast that I didn't have time to blink. They began crawling up my legs by hooking themselves in my stockings. I screamed and brushed them to the floor with my hand. I grabbed my pocketbook from my shoulder, laid it on the floor, scooped them inside, and closed my pocketbook with a snap. I made sure that the clasp was secure and left, the forgotten fliers laid, scattered across the hallway floor and forgotten.

# # # # #

After I had them, the killings stopped. From that point on, they lived in a special wooden box that I had made for them. Like grandfather used to take them out of his pocket, I would take them out of my pocketbook from time to time, mostly just to make sure that they were still there.

Time passed. I married, had children of my own. By all accounts I had a normal life, if one could ignore the secret I kept.

I'm old now. Eighty-six my last birthday. My husband died ten years ago, and now I'm alone. I know that time is precious, and I don't have much of it left. I need to find the next keeper.

My granddaughter is coming over at four...