

## Consider the Idea of Good Enough by Claire Tacon

The dentist was busy trying to fit a dental dam into Derek's mouth. The perforated holes for his molars didn't line up, and the rubber kept snapping out of the dentist's latex gloves. The frame holding the dam in place had hit Derek twice. The dentist hadn't apologized. Derek had hoped for some acknowledgment, running his tongue pointedly over the abused tooth.

"Bet you'll be flossing every night after this," the dentist chuckled.

That wasn't the solution Derek had arrived at. But he did feel nostalgia for those missed opportunities. Suck candies paraded in front of him, like orthodontic ghosts of Christmas Past. He'd eaten bins of them in the past six months since his sister had died of cancer and he'd given up smoking. Not that he was about to explain that to this glad-hand with a drill. The X-rays had revealed five cavities. Five, after twenty-seven years without one. He'd smoked since he was fifteen and everyone said it would ruin his teeth. But not smoking, apparently, was worse. He'd have to switch to something else, sugar-free. But weren't those chemicals bad too? Weren't they worming through his tissue, carving pathways for disease just the same?

"My sister was a runner," he said when the dentist released his mouth to reach for an implement.

"Sorry?"

"Runner, organic food. House in the country. Good air. Died of a massive stroke a few months ago."

"I'm so sorry."

"I floss every day. Usually twice. Take my toothbrush to the office to get a lunchtime rub in."

"I didn't mean to imply."

"When your number's up."

The dentist nodded, calm and serious. Dropped his dental mask to show his respect.

Of course, it wasn't true. She'd smoked more than him, ate processed foods, had a stationary bike that collected more dust than miles. But she still didn't deserve that slow decline, that terrible wasting.

And he didn't deserve to sit here and be lectured by a dentist who couldn't handle his own instruments. Ten to one, the hygienist could have accomplished the task by now. If you can fix it, he thought, why the hell do you need to assign blame?