



The Appointment

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Saga
LITERARY AGENCY

They're standing outside the white building when Juri starts feeling nervous about going in.
The letters on the glass door glisten in the sun.

Rotan Dentistry

"Do you have a cavity? Do you have to get a filling?" Evy asks.

"I don't think so," Juri replies.

"I think it's just a check-up."

"Are you going by yourself?"

"Yeah, Mom said I'm old enough to do that now, and Dad's on a work trip."

"I can come with you," Evy says.

"No, Mom said I should be able to do it on my own."

But really, he feels like he's still too young.

He started feeling this way standing outside the perfect white building.

His mom should be here with him.

Yesterday, going alone didn't seem like a big deal.

But not now.

His appointment is in ten minutes.

Juri got here early.

He doesn't like being late.

Evy gives him a small smile.

He feels like he's going to cry.

He looks away.

He can't let Evy see how young he still is.

"See you later, then."

"Yeah."

The waiting room has blue chairs.

The radio is on full blast.

No one else is there.

Juri sits down on a chair in the corner.

There are magazines on the table.

About salads and stuff like that.

And travel to countries with flowers and beach chairs.

Juri's never been to the tropics.

Maybe one day he can go there.

He hopes he'll have nice teeth then.
The kind you can show off with a charming smile to the people relaxing on the beach.
He wonders if he'll be a dad someday.
Whether he'll bring his kids to the tropics.
His kids won't have to go to the dentist by themselves.

A man comes in.
He's tall.
"Hi," the man says with a smile.
"Hi," Juri replies.
The man sits down.
There are five empty chairs between them.
Juri wonders if they're going to say anything else.
Six more minutes until his appointment.
The news comes on the radio.
They say a man has escaped from jail.
He's tall and is wearing a yellow jacket.
The man in the waiting room has an orange jacket.
Where does yellow end and orange begin, really?

His mom has said he feels things extra strongly.
"You could make one very special spy," she says.
"You notice things other people don't."
She always sets him apart from everyone else.
Juri doesn't know if he likes that.
Is he really that special?

A woman comes out of a door.
She calls out a last name.
It's the man's.
He rolls up his yellow-orange jacket and takes it into the dentist's office with him.
Juri wonders if the dentist will notice it.
He wonders if the dentist heard the news on the radio.
At the same time, a new person comes into the waiting room.

She must be around twenty years old.
She has a metal button in her nose.
She doesn't say hi.
So he doesn't either.
It's quiet.
Juri doesn't like when it's quiet like this in a room with someone he doesn't know.

He could say something.
It would have to be about the metal button, in that case.

About what it's like to pick her nose.
Then a song breaks the silence.
The song is in English, and it's about someone who wants to kiss someone else's big, red lips.
The musician says he wants to lick them like they're strawberries and cream.
Someone must've turned up the volume.
It feels so awkward.
Sitting in a room with someone he doesn't know, and then this song about licking someone else's lips comes on the radio... it's all too much.

Juri goes to the bathroom.
He still has time.
Sometimes he just has to go to the bathroom.
Without going pee.
It's nice being able to go to the bathroom when something is so exhausting.
Now he realizes just how much he's dreading the appointment.
One of his upper molars feels a little soft and swollen.
Juri does what his mom has told him to do.
He breathes.
Not with his lungs, but with his stomach.

The waiting room is empty again.
His appointment time has passed.
He should've been in there thirty seconds ago.

Two minutes late now...
Did they call his name when he was in the bathroom?
Five, then ten minutes pass...
It feels like his body is detaching from his brain.
Like the plug between him and the rest of the world is being pulled out.
His heart clenches like a fist.
He wants to leave.

But he can't leave.
He shuts his eyes.
He imagines he's in the tropics.
Lying on the beach.
Getting sand on his towel.
Things are never as perfect as they look in pictures.
Teeth are never as shiny as they are in photos.
The salads in the magazine look good.
But salad is never actually good in real life.
Everything is a lie.
And now the tears start flowing.

Unexpected tears.
He wasn't ready for them this time.
He can usually tell when they're coming.
But now they just keep flowing, and he can't make them stop.

That's when the door to the waiting room opens and someone comes in.
That's when the only person who matters comes into the room.
Mom.

"Juri!
Sorry, honey, I remembered wrong!
Your appointment's tomorrow!
I'm so sorry!"
And then everything softens, and the chairs are left sitting there like a lower jaw with blue teeth.
They go outside.

"You can come with me tomorrow," Juri says.
"I will," Mom says.
"Sometimes I forget that you're still just a kid."

Juri wonders if he'll still get a prize from the drawer at the dentist.
That's one of his favorite things in the world.
Something inside him tells him that he can't ask his mom about it, though.
He's gotten too big for that.
And he's not even that big.

His mom puts a hand on his shoulder on their way down the stairs.
"Come on, we'll get some ice cream.
With two scoops!"
There's a police car parked outside.
"Hi," a policeman says.
The lights flash silently, casting a blue glow on the white building.
"I want mango and banana," Juri says.
"Of course you do. You love yellow," his mom replies.