

*The following scene is a writing sample not included in the book, **Died Innocent**. Brothers Cal and Junior McKee are in jail with Junior suffering from the pain of a severely impacted tooth. In compliance with the sheriff's request, Deputy Adwell has called in the man who passes for Savannah's dentist.*

*In the late nineteenth century it was not uncommon for barbers to provide a few services beyond haircutting for their clientele. Those services ranged from the ordinary—such as removing lice from a person's head and trimming or shaving beards/mustaches—to the more problematic—such as performing minor surgery or extracting teeth. The latter being the case for Junior McKee.*

## **DEALING WITH AN OFFENDING TOOTH!**

“Hi der, I'm Franz Braun,” the beefy little Prussian greeted in a bastardized pronunciation that indicated he had grown up in a home where English was not the native tongue.

Despite the swelling making any such announcement unnecessary, Junior replied, “I'm Junior McKee, the fella you're lookin for. Glad to see you.” In fact, he had mixed feelings about the meeting. While ridding himself of the agonizing tooth held great appeal, the attending pain necessary to get the job done did not.

“Well, we might as well get started.” The part-time dentist made it clear he was not a man to mince words. “So, if you'd open up wide as possible and point to da problem, maybe I can get a look at what's ailin ya.”

“Right about here,” Junior said, pointing to the lower back left molars. “Can't pick out one particular one, though. They all kinda hurt right now.”

“Hmm, dat ain't good. But, I got my ways to figger it.” Ways or not, the late afternoon light didn't permit seeing well enough to determine much of anything. Assessing the futility of further such effort, Braun called for a chair and bright lantern.

“You got it,” Adwell answered, as he hurriedly set about gathering what was requested. Upon his return, things quickly resumed.

“Now,” Braun said, while jabbing his stubby finger at the chair, “set your carcass down der and let's try dis again.”

This time it was different. Firmly seizing Junior in a tight head lock, he pried open his jaws wider and wider, until finally reaching what seemed the point of

unhinging. Next, he set about tapping each molar in the approximate designated region with a small metal instrument.

“Tell me when it hurts,” he mumbled, with all the confidence of a man who knew one eventually would. Taps one, two and three passed without reaction. The fourth one, however, yielded an earsplitting, “Ahhhhh, shit!” which Cal, the younger of the two brothers, had no doubt could be heard outside the jail, maybe even several blocks in either direction. More importantly, Junior’s violent reaction had yanked him free from the Prussian’s grip.

“Yah, da’s a nasty one you got der,” Braun slurred.

Again gesturing to Adwell for assistance, he directed, “Take dis chair away, and bring me one with arms on it. Need a few ropes or belts, too. We’re gonna have ta hold him down better if I’m ta get dat bugger outta der.”

“What?” Junior mildly protested, sensing his initial concern with reference to the pain that was about to be inflicted on him was entirely warranted.

The other prisoners gawked intently as Junior’s wrists were cinched to the replacement chair. Next, Braun wrapped a long cloth over his patient’s forehead, forcefully tilting it backwards until only ceiling could be seen. Subsequent to crossing the cloth behind the chair and tying its ends to opposing back legs, he again stood over his patient, this time staring down into a gaping mouth.

“Now, what say we try dis once’t more.”

Junior was attempting a nod just as another tap shot a second painful bolt through him.

“Sorry ‘bout dat,” Braun muttered, as he feigned verifying his memory, when in fact he was checking the ability of the bindings to restrain his sturdily built patient. “But it wouldn’t help ta yank out da wrong one, would it?”

“Uh, uh.” Junior’s head turned from side to side as much as the cloth holding it in place allowed.

“Okay den, let’s be gettin on wit it. I got udder tings to do today ‘sides you.”

Clenched fists grasping the arms of the chair with all his might, Junior’s anxious eyes blinked his readiness. Without hesitation, Braun’s long-jawed pincers locked on what he suspected to be the offending tooth. Rocking from side to side, he held nothing in reserve. A strenuous series of twists and tugs was followed by an abrupt release, lasting only long enough for Braun to reposition himself for greater leverage. All the while, Junior’s gaze never left the dentist’s distorted face. Tightened eyes and rapid pants of stale breath told him all he needed to know

about the intensity of the struggle. Spectators couldn't be sure whether the groans they were hearing came from the dentist or the patient. In addition, the complaining sound of the arms being pulled free from the confining chair created a cacophony the likes of which no one in the small cell block had ever heard. Whereas jail mates Akins and Spivey were more than willing to take in the entire spectacle, Cal walked to his window and stared at the cross atop a church steeple several blocks away.

"Augh . . ." came a second painful howl, as the patient fought back spontaneous tears. Then at long last, or at least so it seemed to Junior, an extended sucking sound suddenly ceased; the offending tooth having let go. As if having won some grand heroic competition, Braun raised it high overhead for all to see, and the battle was over.

Meanwhile, blood that had been pooling in the back of Junior's throat oozed over his lips and began dripping from his chin. Seeing his predicament, Adwell dashed to slip the knot holding the limp body in place, thereby allowing a tip of the head to deliver a mouthful of blood to the bucket placed beside the chair.

"Here," Braun said, as he offered the wet cloth that had been soaking in a nearby basin of cold water and began to loosen the bindings that held Junior's arms to the now broken chair.

"Wooo, shit," Junior complained, "felt like you was gonna rip my goddamned head off."

"Must say, dat one was tougher dan most. But it looks like you're gonna live."

Again burying his face in the refreshing towel for some minutes, Junior finally rose to his feet and reeled toward his cell.

"Let me give you a hand," Adwell offered.

Unsteady knees barely able to support him, Junior apologized, "Sorry, guess I'm still a bit puny."

"No wonder. He worked ya over pretty good."

"Welllll, you should be feelin better by tomorrow or da next day," Braun said, clearly satisfied with his work. "I left a little sometin for ya wit da deputy here. Try not to eat on dat side for tonight and rinse it wit some salt water now and den. If you ain't better in a coupla days, get da Sheriff ta give me anudder holler. Well, I gotta get back to da shop, so I'll be seein ya -- after all, maybe you'll be needin a haircut one of dese days.

