



GRANDAD'S ALSATIAN (TEETH)

Grandma was audibly excited on the phone.

“Kommt schnell!” she shouted, “Ich muss Euch meine neuen Zähne zeigen. My new teeth, they are *German* teeth!”

It was well-known in the household that Grandma had always wanted a new set of teeth, her old ones being worn out with decades of ... maximum use. And Grandma had had her heart set on German teeth - solid construction but with intricate workings, and guaranteed for twenty years, like the German economy. Mum was busy when the phone-call came, so she sent Amy round to Grandma's.

The door was flung open.

“Oh, my darlink!” she called, flinging her arms around Amy. Amy squirmed and looked up and down the street to see if any of her friends or school-mates might be passing. Luckily, there was no one in sight. What she did see, however (and she gulped when she saw it), was a tiny flying-saucer parked on top of Grandma's redcurrant bushes: you know - the kind of saucer hamsters have.

“So!” went on Grandma, whirling Amy inside, “You have come to see my new teeth, nicht wahr? Guck mal, hier sind sie und sie sprechen sehr gut Deutsch! Ich brauch -”

“Oh how lovely, Grandma,” interrupted Amy, desperate to avoid a long lecture in German on the wonders of European teeth technology, and even more desperate to avoid the sight of Grandma extracting her teeth to show her the exquisite craftsmanship. Grandad had done that to her often enough, as a joke, and it was not a pretty sight. “And where did you get them?”

Grandma looked at her archly. “Now let me tell you about that, my little treasure. My dentist, you know, old Mr Clapperton down at the village, he wanted to give me those National ones. No, I said to him, I do not want National ones, because they don't fit well and they always fall out. I had National ones for thirty years, and now I want new ones.”

Amy had never seen Grandma's teeth falling out before, but what did she know...?

“No, Mr Clapperton, I told him, I want *good* teeth. Now look, I had my catalogue with me, and showed him what I wanted: the model CHOPPA-2000, in white. Guck mal...” Grandma rummaged in a pile of catalogues and magazines that had once felled Grandad and put him in hospital with a fractured arm, and which no one with the zest for life ever went near. “Look, I'll show you. Now here is it - *Totally Teacups*, no, that's not it... *Egg-Cosy Emporium*... *Just Junk*... *Fast Times*.. oh, I have so much rubbish here, I must clear it out - ah! Here we are: *Dental Delights, the Mail Order Catalogue for Those Who Appreciate Fine Teeth*. It came through the post, you know. So, I have marked the page down - now look at that : the CHOPPA-2000.”

Amy averted her eyes rapidly from some rather horrible photos of a set of teeth, now in a lady's mouth, now out, from on top and from the front. Grandma started reading.

“Awarded a top prize at the prestigious World Exhibition in Aix-lesDents, 1997... Runner-Up at Las Vegas, 1996. Recommended by dentists everywhere... The teeth have been individually sealed with the special Speekeezee-XQ™ formula, which guarantees their trouble-free usage for fifty years... Oh, and listen: the upper and lower pads, developed in our secret laboratory in Switzerland, have been tested by 200 volunteers - what do you think of that?”

“Sounds lovely, Grandma. And how much are they?” asked Amy innocently.

Grandma laughed nervously and lowered her voice. Grandad was in the living room, watching golf on the tv. “A bit expensive, my darling. But worth every penny. A little bit more than £1200...”

Amy gasped. She knew that that was expensive by even Grandma's interesting standards. She was about to say something when she saw Grandma smiling in an odd way.

“But just you wait and learn what I have done, mein Schätzchen! Oma ist ja schlau! So I said to old Mr Dingsbums, I said these are the ones I want. Clapperton, he looks at the catalogue and snorts, yes - he snorts! I have never liked that man, he is not gentle. Now Mrs Greening, she goes to a nice lady down in the town, never has any pain, and never has to wait. Private, though. I don’t think your Grandad would let me go there. I say to Clapperton, but these are what I want, none of your cheap British rubbish. Clapperton sighs and says, all right, Mrs Brown, I will order these for you in your size.

“But just imagine, my darling, what has happened today. My little friends have brought me much better teeth than even the CHOPPA-2000, and see what else they have!”

Amy looked around: she had a sneaking suspicion what little friends Grandma was talking about. And then she saw them. And groaned.

“Still skinny,” muttered one of them to the other.

“No pouches yet,” said the other to the first.

And they went on stuffing themselves with bits of broccoli and toast-crumbs.

“Haricot Bert and Patty Perkins,” sighed Amy, “I might have known it would be you two. What on earth are you up to now?”

“No pouches, but cheeky,” giggled Bert.

“Hallo, skinling,” said Patty. “Hamsters have new invention. Will conquer the world with this one, bets you.”

“Gobble it up, more likely,” giggled Bert.

“And what is your wonderful new invention?”

“FALSIES.”

“Falsies!” exclaimed Amy, outraged, “But falsies were invented ages ago! You can’t say hamsters invented those!”

“Not falsies, silly girl. Have ears but not as good as hamsters.”

“Hamsters have ears,” said Bert proudly, cleaning his with a great deal of pride.

“But you said falsies...” said Amy bewildered.

“Not falsies - FALSIES. Firmly Adhering Linguistic Substitutes for Interpreting English Sentences.” Patty Perkins was manifestly proud of himself.

“Good grief,” muttered Amy, clutching her brow.

“Now, my darling,” said Grandma, presenting a tin of biscuits to Patty and Amy in turn. “These are very clever young hamsters. You just listen to what their invention can do.”

Haricot Bert puffed himself up proudly. “Hamster have great inventions. Best inventions in all world. FALSIES better than anything ever.”

“FALSIES come in all models - German, French, Spanish, Esquimeau. Just push them in and you start talking German or French or Esquimeau. You want try?” Patty nudged Bert, who had just settled down for a snooze in Grandma’s fruit bowl, the scent of apple and pear all around him. Bert twittered then scampered round the back of the sofa. He emerged dragging a box.

“Look, hamsters have Manx teeth here. You try,” he said.

Amy backed off. “Not on your life,” she said.

“Ach, du bist ja so wie deine Mutter!” exclaimed Grandma. “Here, let me show you.” And with that, Grandma did what Amy had feared most: she ejected her new German teeth, and deftly inserted the teeth from the Isle of Man which Bert had produced. No sooner were they in than Grandma started speaking Manx.

“Fastyr me eu, Amy, laa braew grianagh. Litcheragh goll dy lhie, litcheragh girree seose, as litcheragh goll dys y Cheill Jydoonee!”

Amy gaped. She was used to Grandma breaking out into German at times, but this was something new

and awefully different altogether.

Grandma proudly replaced her new German teeth.

“What did you say there, then, Grandma?”

“I said ‘Good afternoon, Amy, it’s fine sunny day. Lazy going to bed, lazy getting up and lazy going to church on Sunday.’ An old Manx saying, I believe.”

“Here, skinny one,” said Patty, “Try these ones - they’re from Alsace. Very good.”

Amy was looking at them suspiciously when Grandad wandered in unannounced.

“Oh, it’s you, Amy. What like?” he said morosely. “What’s that you’ve got there, Charlotte? Is that my new teeth arrived? Good job.” He cheered up visibly. “Here, I’ll just try them in...”

Without any further ado, Grandad seized the Alsatian teeth and stuck them in his mouth.

“Bien sûr, ils sont très bons, ces dents. Was haben sie gekostet? Sehr gemütlich et tres confortables!”

Grandad sauntered back to the living room, pleased with his new teeth.

“See?” said Patty Perkins, “They work like a treat.”

“Hamsters have treats,” said Bert hopefully, looking around and feeling hungry.

Grandma picked up another box which the hamsters had brought with them. “And what are these ones, meine kleinen Freunde? Was steht denn hier? - ‘Trooper Teeth?’ These are for soldiers?”

Patty whispered something urgently to Haricot Bert, who promptly seized the box which Grandma was about to open.

“Not good teeth for you, Mrs Brown,” said Patty hastily, “Not good words at all with those... Here,” he looked around for another box, “Why Amy not try these?”

The box he pushed towards her was different. “Topp Sekrit” was written in a shaky hand all round the side.

“This new line in FALSIES,” whispered Patty unnecessarily, “Straight from HamLabs. Made with new materials. You try.”

Dubiously, Amy opened the box. There was quite a small set of teeth inside, which was lucky as there was not much room in her mouth at the best of times. Gingerly she inserted them and moved her jaw about until they sat comfortably.

“Now, say something, my darling!” urged Grandma excitedly.

Amy tried to say ‘These are quite all right but I wouldn’t want to wear them all the time’, but it came out sounding like

‘Cluck-tuck-tuck-tuck. Cluuuck-cluck-tuck-tuck!’

Amy was startled. She ejected the teeth rapidly and examined the box in more detail. Mad from recycled egshels, it said underneath.

Patty looked at her hopefully. “You like egg-teeth?” he asked.

Amy shook her head firmly.

Patty shook his head sadly. Bert consoled himself with an enormous slice of apple which Grandma had found for him.

Patty sighed. “Hamsters have new line in FALSIES - made from old egg-shells, old toilet-pans, old newspapers - all recycled and good for planet.”

Amy shuddered. Really, teeth made from old toilet pans...what on earth would *they* sound like? She thought she knew..

But Grandma was undaunted. “These are really the best teeth I have ever had,” she said magnanimously, patting Haricot Bert on his bottom. “I will never ever exchange them for anything.”

“Hamsters have good teeth,” agreed Bert, showing his as he yawned and fell asleep.

Amy could hear a conversation between a Frenchman and a German in the living room. Grandad was talking to himself, contented that someone at last was listening.

“Oh yes, hamsters have good teeth,” Amy had to agree.

