

## **The Root of Evil**

Ornob was rather restless as he settled down on the second last chair of the row. He had only heard of these things so far, and the long wait was killing. He remembered Manai's bedtime stories about bad children who were sent to clinics. He recalled how she would scrunch up her face with pain and fear, and scream with hands clamped tight against her cheek. If he weren't so nervous, he would have actually laughed.

Two down, three to go. Ornob counted as people shuffled past him, towards the door. Three women were on a plane from London to America, and the engine catches fire. There are only two parachutes onboard, so the brunette says...he didn't bother with the rest of the message. Everybody knows blondes jump out with school bags and die. He wondered how many brunettes send them out by purpose. That would be a clever way to murder, no? But she would have died in the crash anyway. But then, everyone is going to die anyway. So that's okay then... Ornob felt a little lighter, having drawn that conclusion. Three down, two more.

"Umm..." he hesitated as he approached the receptionist. "Aah...I'm going for a short walk." He forced a smile onto his face. Did she see it? Wasn't she after all, an expert at such smiles?

"Sure sir!" her straightened hair, glossy lips, shiny eyes betrayed nothing. "You're due in an hour sir." Ornob felt a strong urge to see a real expression on her face. "maybe" he thought "if I push a pin into her thumb, she would shriek." He grinned as he walked outside, into the setting sun.

Funny, isn't it? What a man can do with a sharp knife? A drill or two, a hammer... yeah. And forceps and tongs and those sharp little hook like things that he saw at the

clinic. And the butter knife that mania used to keep in her kitchen, and – Ornob stopped to stare at the boobs of a passing teenager. Her shiny, thin, gold chain. Wouldn't it be nice if he held it tight, death tight across her neck, from behind? Ornob imagined taking the chain off her neck; little drops of blood and torn skin hanging from it. He imagined her pretty neck – so white, and slim and lovely –with an angry red line scarred across it. “This is my mark” he would tell her. “And now, you will never forget me.”

Ornob looked at his watch and sighed. As he walked his way back into the clinic, he was much more relaxed. He put a hand on his cheek and the pain shot through his face like a current. Ornob smiled as he entered. The receptionist was looking at him. The same blank look that Miss Deepa had given him last night. He walked up to her and put his sweaty palms on her counter, with a soft thud.

“Am I due about now?” he asked, looking straight into her eyes, grinning.

“Yes. Sir.” She faltered under his gaze. “You're next.”

“And you.”

She didn't quite know what to make of that. She watched him as he entered the dentist's clinic. The register read: Ornob Chatterjee, root canal. It didn't tell her what he had done last night.