

Standards

by Lavinia Ludlow

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My mother thinks my standards are too high. I'm not so sure they are. All I ask is that the guy has teeth and an income. More important are the teeth because he can always get a job, but he can't un-rot the teeth he's lost to meth.

I spent these 18 years of my life in Arkansas. For most of it, my mom has been a widowed and unemployed Christian who raised us Christian, but once my sister and I both turned 18, we abandoned The Church swifter and easier than we abandoned our wisdom teeth in the back end of a seedy trailer. With no health insurance, our only answer to our impacted jaws was the town's former oral surgeon who was outcast to the Prickly Cactus RV Park, stripped of his license because he was guilty of fondling girls under anesthesia.

After we left the congregation, Mom left too. Being widowed, she claimed she wouldn't be able to see my sister and I die and burn so she left too so she could die and burn with us.

Shortly after, she traded in her hobby of religion for a boyfriend who led the community's Republican headquarters and worked as a supervisor at a Foster Farms factory in the killing room.

I always hear about the evils and outdated beliefs of Catholicism, but if there's anything I've learned about Mom's new hobby, it's that Christian Republicans are even worse. Now around the dinner table, we not only have to hear about how we're going to die and burn, but we have to hear about how homosexuals, unwed mothers, and

abortionists
are going to die and burn, all while he cleans out his gun.

And every week he seems to chip or knock out another tooth from Mom's head, be it a real one or one from her newly minted denture plate. My sister and I collect them if Mom doesn't accidentally swallow them, and if they don't get lost under the caverns of the oven or fridge upon impact.

"Funny thought," my sister says as she jingles Mom's teeth around in an emptied Tic Tac box. "If the guy you happen to like has no teeth, you can always give him these."

