

## **NICK RALEIGH**

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*Dr. Nick Raleigh is confronted with what appears to be a visible infection when his patient returns for a follow-up visit after oral surgery. As he talks to the patient and examines her, he realizes that he is less prepared for what he finds than he imagined.*

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***Her cheeks are far too swollen. This is not going to be good.***

Dr. Nick Raleigh looked from the doorway at the patient waiting for him in his dental chair. As a relatively new member of the Oliver Dental Practice, Dr. Raleigh was immediately alarmed by the visible swelling his patient displayed. Having recently completed minor oral surgery on Jamie Curry, Dr. Raleigh feared that she was suffering from a serious infection.

### **DR. NICK RALEIGH**

Nick had practiced dentistry for four years at the Oliver Dental Practice in Georgetown, South Carolina. Having grown up in a small, southern city, he was used to small town life and customs. However, after working in the Oliver Practice, he started realized that he was not fully prepared for some of the local home remedies and “natural elixirs” that his patients mentioned to him in their consultations.

Georgetown had seen its share of hard times and dental care wasn’t always covered by health insurance. Many of the town and surrounding area’s residents worked at the local mill, but there remained a significant part of the population that was unemployed and dental care was often considered a luxury. Unfortunately, most of Dr. Raleigh’s patients couldn’t afford regular dental cleanings and check-ups, so he often saw patients for whom extractions were the only option due to the level of decay in their mouths. These “symptom driven care” patients were heartbreaking because by the time they came in to see Dr. Raleigh, his options to try and save the patient’s teeth were very limited.

### **JAMIE CURRY**

Jamie Curry did not like going to the dentist, but she knew she needed to have her teeth pulled. She’d been in pain for weeks, but she kept hoping she could treat the problems at

home. Jamie prided herself on her knowledge of homeopathic treatments and hated taking conventional medication. Approaching her 40s, Jamie almost felt a distrust for doctors and hospitals, instead she preferred natural foods and remedies to medical care. Unfortunately, her home treatments didn't seem to be helping her teeth this time. Her gums were raw and bled and her upper teeth were so sensitive and swollen she could barely eat anything other than very soft foods. Realizing that she couldn't take the pain much longer, she finally broke down and scheduled an appointment with Dr. Raleigh at the Oliver Dental Practice.

### **THE CONSULTATION**

When Dr. Raleigh met Ms. Curry, he knew instantly that she had waited far too long to come see him. Her maxillary central incisors, or top front teeth, were badly infected and it appeared that she had many other infections throughout the rest of her mouth. She suffered from a clear lack of home care and Dr. Raleigh knew he would have to remove some of her teeth. After studying her teeth and gums, Dr. Raleigh presented her a care plan that would involve the removal of seven of her teeth followed by the creation of a partial denture to replace the missing teeth. Jamie agreed that his plan seemed like the best option, and warned him about several allergies she had.

“How quickly can we do this?” Jamie asked.

“I believe I have an opening tomorrow for the extractions,” said Nick. “You'll have to schedule a follow-up visit 24 hours after I remove your teeth so I can make sure everything is healing okay. Are you able to come back Wednesday and Thursday? Or do we need to look further out due to your work?”

Jamie paused briefly to think, but then said, “I'll figure it out. I want to get this over.”

Nick called his assistant and explained the care plan and asked him to schedule Ms. Curry for two more appointments this week. He was pleased to see her back the next day and assured her that she would be feeling better once she had the infected teeth removed. The extraction surgery went very well and he was pleased with the procedure and sutures. Due to a past history of infections in her teeth and gum line, Nick prescribed a course of antibiotics and pain medications to reduce the risk of infection and help with Ms. Curry's pain management.

In spite of the severity of her problems, Nick thought she stood a good chance of healing quickly and benefiting from her new partial dentures. After explaining what she needed to do for the next 24-hours, he reminded her that she needed to come back tomorrow to do a brief follow-up. She nodded in agreement and made her way to the lobby to wait for her ride.

### **THE FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT**

Dr. Raleigh looked from the doorway at Jamie waiting for him in his dental chair. Her entire face was swollen and he instantly knew something was wrong. He was alarmed by Jamie's visible swelling and feared that she was suffering from a serious infection. As Nick tried

to push down his emotions, he couldn't help but think, *This is the most scared I've been for a patient in my entire career. How do I keep from scaring her? This. Cannot. Be. Good.* Trying not to alarm her, he smiled as he walked into the exam room.

"Ms. Curry, how are you feeling today? Are you in very much pain?"

"No, doctor, I'm feeling much better. In fact, I'd say I'm doing great!"

Although Nick was pleased with this response, he remained concerned. "Go ahead and open up for me. Let me take a look in there."

When Jamie opened her mouth, Nick was shocked to see an odd material surrounding her teeth and gums. And as he leaned closer, he noticed a strong odor. His heart dropped. As he used his dental explorer to examine her gums, the grey, oozing, seemingly necrotic tissue started dropping and peeling away. Her gums looked like zombie tissue and he'd never seen an infection like this, especially one that occurred so quickly.

"Ms. Curry, are you sure you're not feeling any pain? Do you feel swollen?" he asked.

Jamie turned to look at him, "No, I feel wonderful. This clay is working wonders for me."

Nick felt his mouth drop open. "I'm sorry, what did you say? Did you say clay?"

Jamie smiled, "Yes, as soon as I got home last night, I went out to my backyard and got some clay dirt to pack in my mouth."

As she explained herself, she started pulling chunks of what Nick originally thought was the frightening infection away from her gum line and from around her extraction sites.

Jamie looked at him proudly and said, "The clay is helping me heal. It's sucking out all of the toxins."

Nick finally began to exhale as he realized that she had removed the material that led him to believe a serious infection was present. Although still reeling from the shock, he was instantly relieved that her face was once again normal sized.

Nick moved slowly towards his stool trying to process what he was hearing. *Oh my goodness, did she really put dirt in her mouth?!?! What is going on here? What in the world is that mess going to do to her wounds? What is wrong with this woman? How can I fix this?*