

Digital Fangs

1

Ava Delgado lit her ring light, the soft glow painting her cheeks porcelain-pale. She angled her phone so the blue studio wall slanted behind her, pinned with polaroids of past photoshoots. Tonight was launch night—her biggest drop of the year, a tooth-whitening serum called Dentifex. It promised “an incandescent smile forged in ancient rites” and retailed for eighty-nine ninety-nine.

“Ready in three...two...” Her manager, Bree, peered over Ava’s shoulder, chewing her lip. “You sure about this copy? ‘From bone-dust to brilliance’ sounds...cultish.”

Ava tapped the little glass vial, catching the light: a whisper of bone-white powder settled like snow. “It’s perfect. People eat up esoteric marketing. Besides,” she flashed practiced teeth, “I’ll be glowing.”

Bree sighed. “Just sell the smile, Ava. No need to mention ancestors.”

Ava winked. “My ancestors love views.”

She hit record. “Hey, Glow-Gang!” she chirped. “I’ve got Dentifex on deck tonight. You’ve seen those celebrity smiles—shaded like fresh ivory? We’re about to get real bright.” She unscrewed the cap, inhaled that sterile-sweet scent, then dabbed the serum onto her incisors. The tingle felt like a million tiny combs brushing over enamel. “Feels amazing,” she breathed. “Hydrating but zingy. Let’s wait ten minutes and see the magic.”

Her followers flooded the live chat with emojis—sparkles, flames, tiny teeth. She smiled wider, lips taut. The serum settled warm against her gums, and she bit her cheek by accident, tasting coppery blood. She ignored it, signing off with a wink. “Stay glowing, babes.”

2

By dawn, the promise of Dentifex had transfigured into a fevered omen. Ava surfaced from fragmented dreams, the taste of copper lingering on her tongue, a phantom ache pulsing beneath her jaw with each heartbeat—a Morse code tapped

out by some unwelcome architect deep within the bone. She staggered to the bathroom, the world pale and trembling, and bared her teeth to the mirror. There, rising behind her right canine, a pointed nub erupted: not the soft milky ivory of childhood, but a hard, creamy fang, the color of bone ash, glinting in the sour morning light.

Ava's breath stuttered, her chest a locked vault of panic. The new tooth staked its claim, slick with a bead of blood as she gingerly prodded it. This was not the glimmering smile Dentifex had promised. She snapped a photo—flash piercing the gloom—and sent it off to Bree with numb urgency.

Ava: "I woke up with a ... *fang*???"

Bree: "Wtf. That's...not normal."

Ava: "Should I see a dentist?"

Bree's reply buzzed in, frantic and terse. "Yes. And pause the serum. Immediately."

The hours that followed unraveled in splinters—an Uber through bruised city haze, the silent terror of waiting rooms, the antiseptic hush of Dr. Park's office. Ava sat, fingers knotted in her lap, as Park peered into her mouth with clinical reverence and ordinary dread. He pressed a gloved finger to the errant tooth, studied the X-ray, and frowned so deeply the lines seemed to etch new years onto his face.

"I've never seen anything like this," Park murmured at last, voice thin as dental floss. "The structure is wholly mature. Roots, pulp, even enamel striations—your body's growing teeth outside its own blueprint." His eyes glinted with something between curiosity and fear.

Ava tried for levity, her voice brittle as spun sugar. "Maybe it's a beauty trend. Custom fangs. Shark-chic."

Park didn't smile. His scalpel hovered, a crescent of cold light. "I can remove it, but this—" His gaze lingered, too gentle for comfort. "Whatever that serum does, it's more than cosmetic. I'd advise you never use it again."

She nodded, knuckles white and trembling, the word "never" echoing in her head like a prayer and a curse. The dentist's office smelled of mint and antiseptic,

but Ava swore she caught a whiff of something older—dust, salt, the trace of ancient bones ground fine.

Outside, the sun was jaundiced, the sky a thin blue bruise. As she stepped onto the street, every reflective surface—the chrome of passing cars, the glass of storefronts—seemed to shimmer with a secret, her teeth glinting in the distorted reflections. Somewhere in the marrow of her jaw, the magic pulsed, restless and unyielding.

In the distance, sirens wailed, a chorus of warning. Ava pressed her tongue to the new fang. It pulsed, alive. She walked home beneath a sky stitched with veins, wondering what she had become.

3

Back home, Ava scrubbed the Dentifex box with alcohol until its label blurred, then slipped the vial deep into her beauty safe—its glass cold against her palm, as if it held more than serum. But the tooth refused to recede. By dawn, two more had erupted, bristling behind each molar, sharp and alien. Her mouth felt crowded, a cave of secrets, her smile suddenly vast, serrated—fit for unlocking something unknown and wild.

Sleep eluded her. Every time she closed her eyes, she imagined the roots tunneling deeper, her jaw blossoming with bone. The city outside pulsed with early morning sirens and the distant click of bike gears, but inside her apartment, the only sound was the faint, persistent ache under her gums. Ava tried to distract herself with old beauty vlogs, but the hosts' gleaming veneers looked cartoonish, fake compared to the beasts she harbored.

In a panic, she Face Timed Lily, her best friend since the days of cafeteria lunches and algebra. When Ava flicked on her LED mirror, the light caught the new teeth in harsh relief. Lily's eyes widened, mouth half-open in horror. "Why do you look like a shark auditioning for Vogue?" she whispered, her voice barely above static.

Ava attempted a laugh, but it scraped against the back of her throat. "New trend: extra dentition. I'm a pioneer. Next season, everyone will want a bite."

Lily leaned closer to her screen, concern etched across her brow. "This isn't a trend, Ava. It's...mutation. You need help." She hesitated, then asked, "Can I see?"

Ava obliged, opening her mouth as wide as she dared. Lily's breath hitched; her gaze searched the darkness behind Ava's incisors. "Holy—Ava, you've got...seven teeth back there? Eight?"

Ava poked at her buccal mucosa, prodding a fang that gleamed like porcelain. "Lifehack?" she joked weakly.

4

That night, Ava sat cross-legged on her unmade bed, the room pulsing with the blue haze of her ring light. Her hands trembled as she angled her phone, trying to hide the way her jaw ached, and her cheeks seemed to press outward with something restless and new. She forced a smile for the camera—too many teeth, too much shine.

"Hey guys," she started, the words sticking like glue to the roof of her mouth. "So... update. Dentifex is part demon, apparently." The forced laugh that followed sounded brittle, somewhere between hysteria and confession.

The live chat burst awake, an avalanche of usernames and messages that scrolled too fast for her eyes to track:

"Show us your fangs!"

"Where can I get that serum???"

"You're going viral, demon smile!"

"Dentifex challenge—who's next?"

Their demands grew bolder, crawling out from behind the screen. Someone offered money, another their own teeth for "experimentation." The words slithered through her, cold and electric, stoking the fever in her jaw.

She hesitated, camera lingering on her lips, her own reflection staring back from the corner of the screen—pale, haunted, too-wide smile trembling with secrets she wasn't sure she could contain. Ava wanted to shut it all off, to retreat into darkness and silence, but the urge to confess, to seek understanding or absolution, kept her tethered to the glow.

Her hands shook harder as she reached for the serum's vial, its glass catching the ring light's glow, casting fractured rainbows onto the wall. She remembered the

taste—chemical, metallic, the feeling of something ancient waking inside her gums. Ava drew a shaky breath, teeth tingling, as if electricity danced through her roots.

In the chat, the voices grew insistent:

“Please, just one close-up.”

“Don’t be shy. Let’s see.”

“I’d kill for teeth like that.”

She forced a smile—her upper row bristling with ivory fangs, the back of her throat a column of spikes. “I’m fine,” she lied, voice wavering as she tried to mask the tremor in her jaw. “Just a little extra growth. Probably a side effect of collagen boosters.” But her words felt hollow, dissipating into the hungry silence of the chat.

The comments multiplied, frantic and gleaming, each one a dare. Someone posted a grainy screenshot of her smile, zoomed and pixelated, drawing red circles over the uncanny angles of her teeth. Ava’s screen flickered as notifications popped up: new followers, new requests, new obsessions. Her heart hammered in her chest, a frantic rhythm that almost matched the buzzing in her gums.

She pressed her lips together, hoping no one noticed the way they bulged unnaturally, as if her mouth were swelling from the inside out. The serum’s vial trembled between her fingers, the light refracting into fractured rainbows that danced along the walls. She imagined her enamel growing, layer upon layer, an unstoppable force pushing the boundaries of her own body.

“Show us more,” the chat insisted. “We want to see what happens next.”

Ava hesitated, feeling the pressure mount, the twisted thrill of exposure mingling with fear. What would happen if she gave them everything? What would remain of her when the hunger behind the screen had finished feasting? The question lingered long after the stream ended, its echo gnawing through the night.

But each laugh felt wrong. She ended the stream, but the followers didn’t leave. Their comments lingered like cockroaches, skittering at the edges of her consciousness long after the screen went dark.

Follower123: “teeth please”

GlowFan: “ch ch ch choose me”

She wiped her forehead, forcing herself to breathe, and staggered to the bathroom. The apartment was silent except for the soft hum of her phone, still buzzing with notifications—a relentless pulse that seemed synced to her own racing heart.

The mirror beckoned, cold and unflinching. Ava stepped before it, half-dreading, half-expecting something monstrous. At first, all she saw was her own face—pale, drawn, eyes wide with exhaustion. But as she leaned closer, the illusion of normalcy unraveled. In the depths of her reflection, she glimpsed another smile blooming behind her own lips, as if a second mouth was trying to surface.

Rows of teeth arched high and deep, forming a cathedral vault behind her skull—long, naked gums gleaming wetly beneath layers of enamel. It wasn’t just her face she saw; it was something ancient, hungry, and patient, waiting just behind her skin. She pressed her tongue to her teeth, feeling them shift and bristle, the tingling intensifying until it threatened to spill from her jaw in a torrent of ivory.

Ava’s hands trembled as she reached toward the glass, fingertips brushing her reflection. For a split second, she swore she felt the pressure from the other side—cool, insistent, as if the thing in the mirror wanted nothing more than to trade places.

Behind her, the glow of her ring light still pulsed, casting fractured rainbows across the tiles. Every color seemed sharper, every shadow deeper. The apartment felt too small, too close, as if the walls themselves leaned in to watch her unravel.

She staggered back, heart pounding, unable to shake the image now etched into her mind: a grin that belonged to no human, a mouth full of secrets and bones. The chat’s demands still echoed—“show us more”—but now Ava wondered if there was anything left for her to show, or if everything she’d ever been was already slipping away, devoured by the hunger that watched through the glass.

5

The next morning, Ava’s phone lit up with a single text from Dr. Park: “Came across something you need to see. Meet me at 2.”

The notification seemed to pulse with the same relentless rhythm as her own nerves, and for a long moment she just stared at it, unable to move.

By noon, she was pacing circles in her kitchen, the taste of metal growing sharper every time she ran her tongue over her teeth. The city outside pressed in with August heat, but Ava shivered as she pulled on a jacket and made her way to Park's clinic, the world blurring at the edges.

Inside, Park's lab felt colder and smaller than she remembered, cluttered with files and anatomical models grinning from the shelves. Park himself seemed diminished, as though he'd aged decades overnight. He didn't meet her eyes, only gestured her closer to a glass tank on the countertop.

A viscous sea-green light filled the tank, illuminating its single, grotesque occupant: a sphere of fused teeth, each one perfectly white, curving and overlapping in impossible configurations—an alien pearl grown from nightmares. Some teeth were tiny and sharp, others massive, their roots tangled in a dense, organic mat. The whole thing seemed to pulse ever so slightly, as though breathing.

"I found this in your saliva sample," Park murmured, his voice barely more than a shiver. "It's... self-replicating. It's forming an independent organism."

Ava's mind reeled. Her stomach twisted with horror and a strange, icy awe. "So it's... alive? Like a parasite?"

Park nodded, his Adam's apple bobbing as he forced himself to meet Ava's gaze. "I'm arranging an urgent pathology consult. But from what I see—this colony isn't just growing. It's feeding off your ameloblasts, the cells that build your tooth enamel. It's as if your mouth has become fertile ground for something that shouldn't exist."

She staggered forward, monologuing even as terror bloomed. "So I'll have no bones...just gums?" She forced a laugh that cracked like a broken veneer. "I could livestream my jaw dissolving."

He placed a hand on her shoulder. "I want to help you. But you have to stop posting about this."

She wrenched away. "My brand is pain!"

His face fell. "This is life or death, Ava."

She left without another word, her pulse thundering in her ears. At home, she smashed all her phones into a heap, shards of glass scattering across the laminate floor like starlight. The urge to reach out—to confess, to document, to explain—tugged at her fingers, but she resisted, fearing what might answer if she called into the digital void.

She sat in the darkness, the air thick with August humidity and the muffled hum of distant traffic. The silence around her felt wrong, unnatural, as if the entire apartment were holding its breath. Somewhere deep in her jaw, she sensed a shifting, a slow expansion that gnawed at her nerves. It was quieter now, a subtle pressure radiating through bone, a chorus of dry leaves brushing together in a tomb. Every time she pressed her tongue against her teeth, she felt their roots flex and pulse, as if caught in a rhythm older than language.

Memories flickered behind her eyes—Park’s face, drawn and grave, the grotesque pearl in the tank, the sea-green light. She tried to recall the taste of summer peaches, the effortless curve of a smile, but only metallic tang answered. She wondered how much longer she could keep herself separate from the thing growing inside her, how long before her thoughts were no longer her own.

She wrapped her arms around herself and waited for dawn, knowing that when the sun rose she would have no choice but to seek the light, to let the world see what she had become.

6

At dawn, she did the only thing she could: she went live again. The room was silent but for the low whine of her fan and the distant pulse of traffic. She stared into the camera, face half-shadowed, jaw taut and trembling. Her fingers hovered above the keyboard, hesitant at first, then decisive, as if some ancient instinct compelled her forward. The stream started. A pale blue glow illuminated her features, making her eyes look hollow and too bright. She drew in a breath, brittle with fear and anticipation.

Outside, birds broke against the morning hush, their calls faint through the closed window. Inside, the weight of what she was about to reveal pressed on her chest. She could feel the colony stirring—restless, hungry—just beneath her skin, the sensation both alien and intimate. The silence of her followers was palpable, a digital crowd waiting for her confession.

With a trembling hand, she adjusted the camera angle, exposing the curve of her jaw, the subtle striations in her gums. The urge to document, to turn suffering into spectacle, warred with a sudden, visceral shame. But the need for connection—however monstrous—won out. She leaned closer, as if the lens might offer absolution, as if the world might witness and understand what she had become.

“I need to confess something,” she said. “I sold you a smile. But I—I sold you death.”

Her lips split pain-bright as she smiled. A row of needle-points braided behind her, almost invisible.

“I wanted followers,” she whispered. “But you follow the wrong god.”

She held up the empty serum vial. Black sludge clung to the sides. Then, with a sudden jerk, she dropped it. The vial shattered; a sheen of oily powder coated the floor like a sacrificial altar.

Behind her, in the warped reflection of the shattered glass, something began to stir—a slow-motion reveal, as if the fragments themselves remembered her before she did. There, hovering just beyond her shoulder, shimmered the apparition of a secondary jaw, its outline glistening with the same oily sheen that glazed the floor. It floated, untethered from flesh yet anchored to her existence, jaws gaping in mimicry of her own haunted expression.

A sudden, mechanical click echoed through the room as the jaw snapped shut, each tooth perfectly serrated and hungry. The vibration skittered up her spine, worming its way into the base of her skull, until it hummed with unnatural anticipation. For a moment, time stilled—the only movement a faint, undulating ripple beneath her skin, as though a thousand tiny creatures pressed forward, desperate to reach the surface.

The air thickened, heavy with salt and static electricity. A whisper crawled to her ear, layered and doubled, the cadence eerily her own yet overlaid with something ancient and insistent: “Feed us.” The demand reverberated inside her chest, a call that was not quite hers but felt as intimate as a heartbeat, urging her onward toward a hunger she could no longer claim as her own.

She pressed a trembling hand to her cheek, feeling the heat and tension roiling beneath her skin. The gum parted with a slick, yielding pop—an orifice opening like

a second mouth, swollen and glistening under the cold, blue glare of the monitor light. She caught her own reflection, doubled and distorted, in the jagged shard of a broken mug on her desk: her face, but wrong, uncanny, beautiful in its grotesquerie.

From the pulsing depths of that new wound, teeth erupted—row upon row, erupting and spiraling like a nautilus shell. Each one was pearl-bright and savage, sharp as regret, glistening with fresh saliva. They pressed forward, crowding toward the surface, hungry for air, for attention, for anything that would quiet their relentless demand. A sound built in her chest—a scream, raw and animal—but before it could escape, the teeth drank it in, vibrating with the energy of her terror, humming in harmony with her pulse. The sound reverberated in her jaw, echoing up through her sinuses, until it became a kind of music: a lullaby for monsters.

Her eyes stung with unshed tears as the sensation overwhelmed her, a riot of pain and strange exhilaration. She was coming apart and becoming something new, sculpted from fear and spectacle, a living confession to an unseen congregation. In that moment, she understood: the stream was no longer a performance, but a transformation—each follower a witness, each view a thread in the tapestry of her unraveling.

Still, she did not look away from the lens. If this was her penance, she would endure it in the open, her body the altar, her teeth the sacrament, her silence the only prayer she had left to give.

7

By noon, the video had amassed half a million views—each flicker, each pixel a feverish beat in the digital artery. Glitches peppered the feed, making it seem as though something behind the screen was gnawing at the edges, hungry for more than just attention. The comments rolled in, a relentless tide of demand: ******"we want more," "show us inside," "I feel it too," "feed the hive."****** Their urgency was palpable, each one a thread tightening around her sense of self.

She reached for the power button, thumb trembling, and shut everything off. But silence was a lie. Rest eluded her, replaced by the uncanny choreography of shadow and light in her apartment—darkness flickering at the corners, hands seeming to

reach out of the warped plaster, scrolling through streams of invisible data. The hum of her laptop charger became a pulse, synchronizing with the static ache in her jaw.

Her phone buzzed, shattering the illusion of solitude. A new DM from "DentifexHQ" glowed on the screen: **"Is everything okay? Would love your testimonial!"** The words felt rehearsed, predatory, as if scripted by something that only understood hunger. She stared at the message, her teeth aching as if they longed to respond on her behalf. Fingers trembling, she typed: **"I'm fine."** But the lie tasted sour, an afterimage of desperation lingering on her tongue.

Another notification popped up—this time from Lily, her last real tether to reality: "They're in your head, Ava. Your followers. They're in your bones."

The message pulsed on the screen, the words etching themselves into her memory like a brand. She felt it then—the electric itch beneath her skin, the silent chorus urging her to broadcast again, to let the teeth sing and the jaw click for its unseen congregation.

Every window seemed to vibrate, the glass humming with invisible music. Ava pressed her palm to the cool pane, wondering if any barrier would truly keep out the tide. Her own reflection hovered just beyond reach, lips parted, teeth gleaming—a living signal, ready to transmit whatever hunger the night demanded. Outside, the city seemed to lean closer, listening for the next confession, waiting for the next performance to begin.

8

Night settled over the city with a suffocating thickness, pressing itself against Ava's apartment windows, smudging neon into bruised puddles on the floor. Inside, she moved as if underwater, her limbs heavy with exhaustion, her mind a hive of restless static. She dragged chairs and camera tripods across the threshold, stacking them in a makeshift barricade that felt more symbolic than secure. The act was ritualistic—an echo of ancient fear—though she knew no lock could hold back the rising tide.

She sat before her vanity, the bright bulbs now dim and flickering, casting her reflection in fractured shards. One by one, she peeled away her stick-on veneers, relics of an older self. They dropped into the mouthwash tumbler, floating like gravestones above the glossy white battlements now revealed. She tried scrubbing the enamel with trembling fingers, but the bristles snapped, giving way to the

inevitable. Her teeth, once a source of comfort, now felt alien—rising in perfect, predatory rows.

In the hush, Ava considered escape. The urge to flee—to hurl herself down the stairwell or out into the churning city lights—fluttered through her veins. Yet her body refused to cooperate. Every muscle, every tendon vibrated with a strange anticipation, as if she were being rewritten from the inside out. She realized, with a shiver of dread, that she was no longer just the author of her own story but a page waiting to be filled, each cell a living notepad, every nerve a taut string awaiting the pluck of a hidden conductor.

Her breath slowed, unconsciously syncing with the rhythm of her teeth. The sound was hypnotic: click, click, click. At first, it seemed random, but soon the clicks stitched together into a pattern, spelling out a word she recognized from the hungry swarm online—GLOWFAN. The syllables rippled through her jaw, a message coded in enamel and desperation.

She leaned forward, pressing her ear to her palm as though seeking solace, or a signal. The silence stretched, swollen and expectant. Then, from somewhere deep within, a whisper crawled into her mind, soft and insistent:

“We are the hive.”

It was then that she understood—she was no longer alone, not truly. The boundaries between self and audience had dissolved into static, her teeth now a transmitter, her body an antenna for the collective longing of those who watched, waited, and hungered for the next broadcast. Shadows danced at the edges of her vision, and every breath she took seemed to draw her further into the unseen congregation, preparing her for the performance the night would inevitably demand.

9

At 3 a.m., she posted one final video. No ring light, no filters—just her in the glow of her cracked vanity bulb. Her hair fell in greasy waves. Her eyes were wide, raw.

“Goodnight, Glow-Gang,” she murmured, her voice a trembling filament in the gloom. “Remember to flash your prettiest grin.”

She stared into the camera, the silence stretching as if daring her to speak. Her fingers hovered above the vanity, tracing the rim of the mouthwash tumbler, nervously tapping out a Morse code only she could understand. The bulb above sputtered, casting her face in flickering relief.

A comment pinged onto the screen—she read it aloud, voice thick with longing. “Ava, are you scared?” She paused, letting the words settle. “Only of what comes after,” she replied, her lips barely parting.

Another message pulsed: “Smile for us one last time, queen.” Ava laughed, a brittle sound. “You always want a smile, don’t you? Even when there’s nothing left to show.”

She leaned forward, pressing her forehead to the cold glass. “Does it hurt?” someone asked.

Her gaze drifted, unfocused. “Sometimes. Not in the way you think. It’s like swallowing static. Like my teeth are singing.”

The chat scrolled faster, a cascade of emojis and questions: “Will you take us with you?” “Is the serum real?” “Are you still you?”

She smiled, a thin, haunted curve. “We’re all a little bit hive, aren’t we? All waiting to be filled.”

Her jaw clicked, a quiet staccato. She closed her eyes, speaking softer, almost to herself. “If you’re watching, listen close. The walls hear you. The night records everything.”

A final ping. She looked up, meeting her own fractured reflection in the vanity mirror. “This is for you,” she whispered, pressing record.

Her voice, no longer just hers, rang out: “Smile, babes.”

Ava didn’t scream. Her jaw unhinged in a final, graceful arc, and the last thing the world saw was her lips curving into a grin that would never fade.

Epilogue

They found her the next morning, slumped over her vanity, the live video still streaming. Comments poured in by the thousands: “Is she alive?” “How do I get that serum?” “Perfect smile 😍.”

And in the rubble of glass and bone, one of Dentifex's empty bottles lay cracked open. From it spilled a single, perfect tooth—the first fang she'd ever grown—gleaming ivory against the dark tile, as if waiting for its next host.

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