

Just Desserts

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"No s_h_i_t_!" Dean Stokes said for about the fourth time during the Thanksgiving Day meal. The sixteen-year-old had been forced to sit at the children's table rather than with the adults, and he was trying to restore what he saw as his lost dignity by bragging and generally showing off in front of little brother, nieces, nephews, and cousins.

If Dean's bad language somewhat amused the kids, who were otherwise annoyed at his overbearing manner, it had the opposite effect on his father. The four-letter "s" word, Dean's favorite, reached Mr. Stokes' ears clearly, and his frown of displeasure deepened as he nevertheless tried to keep up with the talk at the adults' table. A conversation he had had a few months earlier with Dean was running through his mind, but apparently not his son's.

Not that Dean had said anything then - his mouth had been too full of soapy lather. His dad had washed out that foul mouth with soap as a punishment for his son's constant use of unacceptable language.

Mr. Stokes had lectured, "I don't mind a four-letter word now and then, Dean. Sometimes a guy just can't help it. There's a time and place for it. But the way you use those words - trying to impress everyone that you're such a big man - is something I don't like, and it's going to stop - now!"

Dean had had to answer "I promise, sir!", although his response was only partially intelligible, before Mr. Stokes allowed him to spit out the soapy water. That terrible taste had lingered in his mouth for days, and the memory of the lesson he was supposed to have learned hadn't lasted much longer.

Such were Mr. Stokes' thoughts as he grew increasingly anger. He had inclined to be sympathetic toward the teenager when he was made to sit with the kids (there just wasn't enough room at the other table). He had planned to make it up to Dean by letting him join the men in the den after the meal. But now... not only were the kids laughing at his reckless language, some were imitating him.

Finally his patience wore out. As the family was sitting waiting for the pumpkin pie to be served, Mr. Stokes left the room. He re-entered just as his wife and sister were bringing in pieces of pie. In a quiet but firm voice that caught the attention of everyone present, he announced, "If you ladies don't mind, I'm going to serve Dean his dessert."

He walked over to where his surprised son was sitting and placed in front of him a small basin of water, a washcloth, and a half-used bar of soap. The implication of these materials took hold of Dean's mind, and he looked up in horror at his father. "Dad..."

But Mr. Stokes was ignoring him and addressing the rest of the family. "I want to apologize to everybody here for my son's bad language. He's going to apologize himself in a little bit. But first he's going to be punished."

At this last word, all the kids who had been bullied in the past by Dean perked up.

Mr. Stokes went on, "Dean knows quite well what happens if he uses words like that in company - he gets his mouth washed out with soap. I don't just threaten. I've done it before and I've warned him more than once that I'd do it again. Apparently Dean didn't believe me, and now he's going to pay for it."

"Dad!" Dean burst out again, and Mrs. Stokes pleaded with her husband, "Tom, can't you take care of this later?"

"I could, but I'm not going to. Dean's embarrassed me in front of the whole family, and I'm going to return the favor. Besides," he added, looking at the children, "I want these other kids to see what happens to boys who can't keep their mouths clean themselves. Somebody else has to do it for them in a way they don't like!" He picked up the bar of soap and held it up. "Ivory. Dean's favorite flavor." The kids giggled nervously, not knowing how Mr. Stokes wanted them to respond to Dean's very public punishment.

Mr. Stokes then picked up Dean's napkin and inserted one end down the front of his son's shirt collar. It was like a baby's bib. "So we won't mess up your suit," Mr. Stokes laughingly explained. Dean was now indignant. It was obvious that his father cared more about any damage to his clothes than to his ego.

As Dean looked on, wide-eyed and open-mouthed in utter disbelief, Mr. Stokes dipped his hands in the basin, then rubbing the soap between them, worked up a good lather. After drying his left hand on the washcloth, Mr. Stokes braced it on the back of Dean's neck, and moving his right hand with the bar of soap directly in front of Dean's face, said, "Open up, son."

Dean tightened his lips, then shook his head and pulled back.

Mr. Stokes shouted "I said open your mouth!" He pressed the bar of soap against Dean's lips and rubbed it hard and fast. Dean all at once remembered that sickening, acrid taste. He tried to resist, but his father's left hand pushed his head forward. Mr. Stokes leaned down and whispered to his son, "Do you want a red butt to go with your red face?" Dean was indeed blushing from being treated like a little boy, and that blush deepened when some of the nearby kids who had heard Mr. Stokes' threat giggled at his predicament. Dean didn't doubt that his dad, in his present morally outraged state, might carry out that threat and pull his pants down and spank him then and there, so he did what he had to do - he opened his mouth. "Attaboy!" Mr. Stokes encouraged, and plunged in the bar of soap.

It was small enough to fit in Dean's mouth and still allow his father to maneuver it around unpleasantly. Mr. Stokes pulled the soap in and out, determined to clean out that foul mouth of his son's completely. Soapy lather dribbled down Dean's chin and onto his makeshift bib. The

children and adults were spellbound by the teenager's humiliation. They were entranced by Dean's grimaces and facial contortions as Mr. Stokes moved the soap not only back and forth but up and down.

Dean's muffled protests sounded throughout the cleansing. From time to time he would raise his hands as if to ward off his father's activities, but quickly and wisely lowered them at the thought of Mr. Stokes' fiery reaction. Mr. Stokes held his son's head firmly, and Dean had no choice but to endure his punishment. The overpowering, repugnant taste of soap now filled his mouth. Lather was even trickling down his throat.

Every once and a while, Mr. Stokes would look up, and noticing his captive audience, would say something like, "We want Dean's mouth clean, don't we?" Vigorous nods from the kids, especially Dean's younger brother, followed.

When, after a few minutes, Mr. Stokes removed his hand to relax it, Dean unthinkingly spit out his mouthful of soapy water onto the floor. His dad was furious and yelled, "I didn't say you could spit it out! Just for that, young man, we're going to do this until this whole bar of soap is gone!"

Dean groaned.

"Now stick out your tongue!"

Dean obeyed, and Mr. Stokes promptly coated it again and again with soap. Dean thought he was going to be sick at his stomach.

"Now raise it!"

Mr. Stokes ran the bar along the bottom of Dean's tongue, and even into the area beneath it. He didn't want to miss a spot!

The cake was considerably smaller now, and Mr. Stokes held it up before Dean's face. "Lick it. Don't you want it to go away as fast as possible?" Dean licked away. Out of the corners of his eyes he saw that a few of the delighted children had gathered round to watch his embarrassing punishment up close.

Mr. Stokes let them enjoy the show for a while. At last he said, "That's enough of that, son. Now open wide." Dean did so, and his dad placed the remaining fragment on his tongue. "Now chew on it, Dean. Don't bite it and don't swallow it."

He wiped all the lather from his hand with the washcloth, and then stood, arms folded across his chest, watching along with the rest of the family as Dean swirled the foul-tasting substance all around in his mouth. Dean's blush deepened at the scrutiny he was receiving, and he was all but crying from humiliation and the now unbearable odor and taste of soap.

Dean stopped after a few minutes of this torture. "Is it all gone, Dean?" his dad demanded. Dean opened his mouth wide to prove to Mr. Stokes that every bit of soap was indeed gone.

"All right, then. Are you ready to apologize?"

Dean tried to say "Yes, sir," but his mouth was still suffering from its soapy contents, and his words came out garbled.

Mr. Stokes easily guessed what those words were. "Then stand up and apologize." Dean rose, and Mr. Stokes backed away to allow all eyes to fasten on his humbled son.

"I'm sorry I used such bad language in front of everybody. Please forgive me. It won't happen again. Ever." It took a while to deliver this speech, since Dean's mouth was still recovering from its cleansing. He looked pleadingly at his dad, hoping this apology was satisfactory.

Mr. Stokes said, "Okay, son. That's all for now." His voice rose in anger. "But if you do this again, I'll give you soap at one end and my hairbrush at the other!" This time everyone heard the threat. There was some laughter as the onlookers imagined this sixteen-year-old being spanked across his father's lap like a little boy. "You just stand there a while, Dean. You look at us enjoying our desserts, and we'll look at you and know how much you enjoyed yours!" With that he sat down and began eating his pumpkin pie. The rest of the family, except Dean of course, joined him.

During dessert, the adults spoke about how it was sometimes necessary to resort to the harsh old-fashioned methods to get a point across. The kids couldn't help casting gloating glances at their now deservingly humbled table companion. They did feel a little cheated. Wouldn't it have been better if Dean had resisted and earned himself not only a humiliating reprimand, but a (preferably bare) butt warming? As Dean stood there, saliva would gather in his mouth in a natural attempt to wash out the flavor of soap. Dean didn't dare spit it out, so he just had to swallow it.

After everyone finished eating and began moving around, Mr. Stokes walked up to Dean and said, "Would you like to rinse your mouth out now, son?"

"Yes, sir." Dean could speak a little better now, but that disgusting taste still lingered in his mouth, as it would for almost a week.

"Okay. Go ahead."

Dean eagerly picked up a glass of water and after washing his mouth out with it, spit into the basin on the table.

"Didn't help much, did it, son?"

It hadn't, and Dean said so.

"I think this will keep your mouth clean for quite a while, don't you agree, son?"

"Yes, sir, I promise."

"Good boy. Now, how would you like a piece of pumpkin pie? I'll let you have one. And I won't make you go play with the kids and listen to their teasing. Not that you don't deserve it, but I'm such a forgiving dad..." He placed a fatherly hand on his son's shoulder. "You can even come and hang around in the den with the rest of the guys."

Dean said thanks, and his mother presented him with a piece of pie. He ate it enthusiastically but barely enjoyed it. Cleanliness had left a bitter taste in his mouth.