Characters
DR. ROSE, dentist.
AMY, his patient.

Scene:
A modest one-man dentist’s office in midtown Manhattan. An FM radio is tuned to a classical music station. It’s March 21st, Bach’s birthday, and Glenn Gould is playing the rollicking Presto from his Toccata in C minor. The whine of a high powered dentist’s drill slowly asserts itself. In blackout . . .

DR. ROSE: Still with me . . . ?

AMY: (Garbled because his hands are in her mouth) Aargh . . .

DR. ROSE: (Hums along as the drilling gets louder) You’ve heard his Goldberg re-issue, haven’t you?

AMY: Aargh . . .

DR. ROSE: (Groans with pleasure) . . . Unbelievable!

(The drilling gets ferocious)

AMY: OW . . . OW!

DR. ROSE: Woops, sorry about that. O.K., you can rinse.

(Lights up on AMY lying prone in a dentist’s chair with a bib around her neck. She raises up, takes a swig of water, slogs it around in her mouth and spits it emphatically into the little bowl next to her. She flops back down, wiping her mouth. She’s in her forties. DR. ROSE is several years older and on the disheveled side)

DR. ROSE: Glenn Gould. Glenn Gould is the penultimate Bach keyboard artist of this century, period! Open please. (He resumes drilling) No one else can touch him!

AMY: Aarg . . .

DR. ROSE: Wanda Landowska, Roselyn Turek, Trevor Pinnock . . . forget it!

AMY: Aarg . . .

DR. ROSE: (Drilling with rising intensity) Andras Schiff, Igor Kipness, Anthony Newman . . . no contest!

AMY: Aarg . . .

DR. ROSE: Listen to the man . . . ! The elegance of his phrasing, the clarity of his touch . . . The joy! The joy! (He roars)

AMY: (Practically jumping out of her seat) OOOOOHMMMMMMMMMM!

DR. ROSE: Sorry, sorry—afrad I slipped. (His drilling returns to normal) Hear how he hums along in a different key? The man can’t contain himself . . . (He roars again, then calms down for a spate of drilling. He idly starts humming along with Gould) You know, you’re my third patient . . . no, make that fourth . . . that’s pulled out a filling with candy this week. What was the culprit again?

AMY: (Garbled) Bit O’Honey.

DR. ROSE: Almond Roca?

AMY: (Garbled) Bit O’Honey.

DR. ROSE: Ju Jubes?

AMY: (Less garbled) Bit O’Honey, Bit O’Honey!

DR. ROSE: Yup, saltwater taffy will do it every time. O.K., Amy, the worst is over. You can rinse. (He hangs up the drill)

(AMY rinses and spits with even more fury)

DR. ROSE: Hey, hey, don’t break my bowl on me! (Fussing with his tools) Now, where did I put that probe? . . . I can’t seem to hold on to anything these days . . .

(AMY flops back down with a sigh)

DR. ROSE: (In a little sing-song) Where are you? . . . Where are you? . . . Ahhhhh, here it is! O.K. . . . let’s just take one more last look before we fill you up. Open. (He disappears into her mouth with the probe) Amy, Amy, you’re still grinding your teeth at night, aren’t you?

AMY: (Anguished) Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrr!

DR. ROSE: You’ve got to wear that rubber guard I gave you!
AMY: (Completely garbled) But I can’t breathe when it’s on!

AMY: (Incomprehensible) I feel like I’m choking! I’ve tried to wear it, I really have. I just always wake up gasping for air. See, I can’t breathe through my nose. If I could breathe through my nose, it wouldn’t be a problem . . . .

(A radio announcer has come on in the background during this)

RADIO ANNOUNCER: That was Glenn Gould playing Bach’s Toccata in C minor, BWV listing 911. And to continue with our birthday tribute to J.S. Bach, we now turn to his Cantata BWV 80, “Ein Feste Burg,” as performed by the English Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Raymond Leppard. (It begins)

DR. ROSE: (Comes out of her mouth) Well, let’s whip up a temporary filling and get you out of here. (He rummages through his tray of tools)

AMY: Dr. Rose, could I ask you something?

DR. ROSE: Of course, today’s March 21st, Bach’s birthday! (Some instruments fall, he quickly recovers them) Woops . . .

AMY: I keep having this recurring nightmare.

DR. ROSE: Oh, I love this piece. I used to sing it in college. Mind if I turn it up?

AMY: I just wonder if you’ve heard it before.

DR. ROSE: (Turns up the volume, singing along. He returns to his tray and starts sorting out his things which keep dropping. He quickly retrieves them, never stopping his singing)

    Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,
    Ein gute Wehr und Waffen . . . woops.
    Er hilft uns frei aus aller, Not,
    Die uns irzt hat . . . woops . . . betroffen.

AMY: I have it at least three times a week now.

DR. ROSE: I came close to being a music major. This close!

AMY: I wake up exhausted with my whole jaw throbbing. Waa . . . waa . . . waa!

DR. ROSE: O.K. let’s just open this little bottle of cement here. (He starts struggling with the lid)

AMY: You know, the old . . . TEETH-GRANULATING-ON-YOU-DREAM! (She stifles a sob) You’re at a party flashing a perfect smile when suddenly you hear this splintering sound like someone smashing teacups in the next room . . . . . . . . . ping . . . . . . . tock . . . . . . . crackkkkkkkkk . . . tinkle, tinkle “Well, someone’s having a good time!”, you say to yourself expecting to see some maniac swinging a sledgehammer . . .

(Having a worse and worse time with the bottle, Dr. Rose moves behind her chair so she can’t see him)

DR. ROSE: Ugh . . . . . . ugh . . . . . . . ugh . . . . . . . ugh

AMY: So you casually look around, and of course there is no maniac! . . . Then you feel these prickly shards clinging to your lips. . . . You try to brush them away, but suddenly your mouth is filled with them. You can’t spit them out fast enough! (She tries)

DR. ROSE: GODDAMNIT! (He goes through a series of silent contortions trying to open it—behind his back, up over this head, down between his legs, etc. etc)

AMY: (Still spitting and wiping) People are starting to stare. . . . You try to save face. (To the imagined party goes) “Well, what do you know . . . . I seem to have taken a bite out of my coffee cup! Silly me!” (She laughs, frantically wiping)

DR. ROSE: GODDAMN SON OF A BITCH, WHAT’S GOING ON HERE!

AMY: That’s just what I want to know!

DR. ROSE: IS THIS SOME KIND OF CONSPIRACY OR WHAT?

AMY: Why me? What did I do?

DR. ROSE: They must weld these tops on.

AMY: Then I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror . . .
DR. ROSE: (Starting to cackle) Think you can outsmart me? (He starts whacking a heavy tool down on the lid)

AMY: You got it! My teeth are spilling out of my mouth in little pieces. I frantically try and moosh them back in, but there's nothing to hold on to. Then they start granulating on me ... sssssssssssssss ... it's like trying to build a sandcastle inside an hour glass!

(DR. ROSE is having a worse and worse time. He finally just sits on the floor and bangs the bottle down as hard as he can, again and again)

AMY: My mouth is a blaze of gums. We are talking pink for miles ... ! Magellan staring out over the Pacific Ocean during a sunset in 1520—(As Magellan) "Pink ... pink ... pink ... pink!"

(DR. ROSE starts to whimper as he pounds)

AMY: What does it mean, is what I'd like to know! I mean, teeth are supposed to last forever, right? They hold up through floods, fires, earthquakes and wars ... the one part of us that endures.


AMY: So if they granulate on you, where does that leave you? Nowhere!

DR. ROSE: (Curls into the fetal position and focuses on smaller moves in a tiny voice) Come on ... come on ... Please? Pretty please? Pretty, lovely, ravishing please?

AMY: You could have been rain or wind for all anybody knows. That's pretty scary. ... (Starting to get weepy) One minute you're laughing at a party and the next you've evaporated into thin air. ... (Putting on a voice) "Remember Amy? Gee, I wonder whatever happened to her?" (In another voice) "Gosh, it's suddenly gotten awfully chilly in here. Where's that wind coming from?" (Tearful again) I mean, we're not around for that long as it is, so then to suddenly, ... I'm sorry, I'm sorry. It's just that I have this um ... longstanding ... Oh God, here we go ... (Starting to break down) Control yourself! Control ... control!

(DR. ROSE is now rolled up in a ball beyond speech. He clutches the bottle whimpering and emitting strange little sobs)

AMY: See, I have this longstanding um ... fear of death? It's something you're born with. I used to sob in my father's arms when I was only

... Oh boy! See, once you start thinking about it, I mean ... really thinking about it ... You know, time going on for ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and you're not there ... it can get pretty scary! ... We're not talking missing out on a few measly centuries here, but boom! And back to dinosaurs again? ... (More and more weepy) Eternity ... Camel trains, cities, holy wars, boom! Dinosaurs, camel trains, cities, holy wars, boom! ... Dinosaurs, camel trains, cities, holy wars. ... Stop it Amy ... just ... stop it!

DR. ROSE: (broken) I can't open this bottle.

AMY: (Wiping away her tears) Dr. Rose! What are you doing down there?

DR. ROSE: I've tried everything.

AMY: What's wrong?

DR. ROSE: (Reaching the bottle up to her) I can't open it.

AMY: (Taking it) Oh here, let me try.

DR. ROSE: I'm afraid I'm having a breakdown.

AMY: I'm good at this kind of thing.

DR. ROSE: I don't know, for some time now I just haven't ...

AMY: (Puts the bottle in her mouth, clamps down on it with her back teeth and unscrews the lid with one turn. She hands it back to him) Here you go.

DR. ROSE: (Rises and advances towards her menacingly) You should never ... NEVER DO THAT!

AMY: (Drawing back) What?

DR. ROSE: Open a bottle with your teeth.

AMY: I do it all the time.

DR. ROSE: Teeth are very fragile. They're not meant to be used as tools!

AMY: Sorry, sorry.

DR. ROSE: I just don't believe the way people mistreat them. We're only given one set of permanent teeth in a lifetime. ONE SET, AND THAT'S IT!
AMY: I won’t do it again. I promise.

DR. ROSE: Species flourish and disappear, only our teeth remain. Open please. *(He puts cotton wadding in her mouth)* You must respect them, take care of them. . . . Oh, why even bother talking about it, no one ever listens to me anyway. Wider, please. *(He puts in more cotton and a bubbling saliva drain)* O.K., let’s fill this baby and get you on your way. *(He dabs in bits of compound)* So, how’s work these days?

AMY: Aarg . . .

DR. ROSE: Same old rat race, huh?

AMY: Aarg . . . .

*(During this, the final chorus, “Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn” has started to play)*

AMY: *(Slightly garbled)* What is that tune? It’s so familiar.

DR. ROSE: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

AMY: Right, right! I used to sing it in Sunday school 100 years ago.

DR. ROSE: Actually, Bach stole the melody from Martin Luther.

AMY: *(Bursts into song, garbled, the saliva drain bubbling)* “A mighty fortress is Our God . . .”

AMY: . . . a bulwark never failing
    Our helper he amid the flood
    Of mortal ills prevailing.
    For still our ancient foe,
    Doth seek to work us woe . . .

DR. ROSE: *(Joining her)*
    . . . Und kein’ Dank dazu
    haben
    Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem
    Plan
    Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.
    Nehmen sie uns den Leib,
    Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib. . . .

*(Their voices swell louder and louder)*

*(BLACKOUT)*