

cut 7 min.  
read Dad's part in *Tapped* monologue  
The Dentist

My daddy got up early one morning last week and decided to go to the dentist to get a tooth pulled. Most of his teeth had either let go, or been yanked out by this same dentist several years before.

After coffee, he hobbled out into the dense and raw dawn with his metal walker, headed for his old green pickup, which had been bumped and butted by his cows till it looked like it belonged in a salvage yard. South of the low green house, and just over the wire fence, stood his old brindle brahma like something developed out of bad film. When she saw Daddy, she started lowing with her long horns aimed at the bluing sky. "Hush up, I'm going after it," he said. "Rotten's what you are." The pines across the highway stood in silhouette against a rosy backdrop, and it was hot already--another steamy day in the flatwoods.

The dentist's office is located in Jasper, Florida, about a fifteen-minute drive from my daddy's place, Georgia-side of the Georgia/Florida line. So it was only about eight o'clock when he got there, and he had to sit in the truck waiting for the receptionist and the dentist<sup>''</sup> to poke on in, as he said. When the young woman finally drove up, Daddy got out and followed her with his walker to the door of the small brick building. A new office that smelled of damp cement. Waiting till she got the lights on and the computer

glimmering, he stood before the counter separating her quarters from the small waiting room. Then he told her again that he'd come to get a tooth pulled.

"Are you in pain?"

"Not especially."

"You don't have an appointment, do you, Mr. Staten?"

"Not as I know of."

She was already reading her list of appointments for the day. *she said,*  
*He's*  
 said "I'm afraid Dr. Finney won't be able to see you then,"  
 booked up."

"Just tell him I'm here," Daddy said and clopped the walker before him to the row of straight chairs along the white wall. He sat in the one closest to the window and watched the sun rising like a blistered peach over two pecan trees with touching branches.

In about thirty minutes, the receptionist came back to the counter where the white light overhead showered down. "Mr. Staten, Dr. Finney said to tell you he'll see you if you can wait about an hour."

Daddy whistled low, picked up his walker and set it down on the white-tiled floor. "Tell him I gotta run by the feedstore before dinnertime. Old brahma I been babying is bellering for sweetfeed."

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A young mother with two cleaned-up little farm boys came in and sat in the chairs on Daddy's right, and for something to do to while away the minutes, Daddy talked to them: "You girls glad school's out?" Daddy always did have a way with children. At first they rared back, kicking their bare feet, then rolled into their mother's skirt

and hid their faces. Over their chairs hung a Victorian picture of an expectant woman in pink, lounging in a white wicker chair. The room smelled of paint, hummed with cool air. Daddy got up, whistling like he does when he tries to walk, or remember. He clobbered the walker over to the counter.

"That hour's about up," he said to the receptionist.

"Yessir," she said, "we had a little emergency."

"I gotta get on to the feedstore," he said and hobbled back toward his chair. Midway, he stopped and fanned his right hand like a politician about to speak. "You boys is about wallowed yo mammy down," he said to the children. And then to the woman, "Ain't they, ma'am?" The sun was now shining down on the tops of the pecan trees.

In less than five minutes, the receptionist called Daddy in. He followed her through the door to the hall that branched off to four chrome-and-white rooms with tan leather dentist chairs--Daddy counted them. Through the door to one of the rooms, the receptionist led him, told him to sit in the chair and Dr. Finney would be right with him.

She was looking through a manila folder with her back to him. "Mr. Staten, you haven't been in for a cleaning in...more than ten years."

"I ain't got nothing to clean but this one ole snag."

She turned. "Still, we have to..."

"Just pull it," he said, pointing to the leaning, brownish peg centered on his bottom gums.

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Two hours later, long past dinnertime, he was walking up the hall again, whistling, with the single tooth behind him in a metal pan shaped like a comma. Through the door to where the boys and their

mother waited. Plus about six more patients, some looking at magazines, and some just sitting with stunned looks. An older woman in a turquoise and white dress was talking to the receptionist about the new office, how pretty it was.

Daddy stepped up to the counter, parked his walker, and reached into his hip pocket for his billfold. "How much is that, little lady?" he asked the receptionist.

"You have insurance, Mr. Staten?"

"Not as I know of," he said, pulling out a twenty-dollar bill and laying it on the counter.

She was staring at the computer screen, typing in his dental history. She looked up at the twenty and stopped typing. "Mr. Staten, the charge for this visit is sixty dollars."

Huh! Daddy was already folding his billfold, sliding it into his pocket again.

"You want me to send you a bill for the rest?" *she asked.*

Daddy opened his billfold for the second time. "Sixty dollars," he said. "Y'all gone up a sight on your prices since you built this *hell* place, ain't you?"

"Yessir," she said, holding the twenty and waiting while he counted out two more into her hand. "Next time call before you come in, Mr. Staten. And before you go, let me make you an appointment. Dr. Finney wants to see you back here in six weeks."

"I bet he does."

- My Daddy left S Ga the year before I  
was born - I was born on his birthday  
while he was serving a term in ~~the~~  
World War II, in London England.

- When he got home, he never left ~~out~~  
our ~~small~~ cattle farm in S Ga. He's  
eighty now, and I can honestly say I  
hardly remember him going <sup>per</sup> to Valdosta,  
our nearest big town, 30 miles away,

~~But now that he is 80, and as he says~~  
~~partial invalid, it he calls "a little on~~  
~~the crippled side, I bought out this ~~copy~~~~  
~~and ~~to the doctor,~~ I added some of my~~  
own. He's the big boss.

I wrote this piece after he called  
me one day I told he believed he'd get or  
the next morning I get that tooth pulled; I  
asked did he make an appointment I he  
~~just~~ said. <sup>uhh</sup> ~~What was that?~~  
~~What would I need~~