

Tooth

written by

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FADE IN:

Open on BLACK from the inside of TED'S mouth. The title card FADES IN: "TOOTH" remains on for a BEAT and fades out. We remain on BLACK for a few BEATS as we hear DR. JOHN WESLEY HARDIN go between humming and singing the old Eddy Arnold cowboy song "CATTLE CALL." Then light begins to crack into view between TED'S teeth as he opens his mouth.

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - INSIDE TED'S MOUTH - DAY

From the POV from inside TED'S mouth we see a dentist, DR. JOHN WESLEY HARDIN, reach in with a couple of dental tools to examine a tooth. He pokes around in the lower left corner of the screen indicating trouble with one of TED'S molars.

Our story takes place in CHICAGO, but DR. HARDIN is Texan and talks with Texan accent. He's wearing a typical white doctor jacket and sporting dental surgical glasses, and on top of his head is a brown, Tom Mix style cowboy hat. He's also wearing a cowboy shirt, handkerchief around his neck, boot cut jeans with chaps, and cowboy boots and spurs.

TED, late-20s, is lying in the dental exam chair as an exam light hangs overhead shining behind DR. HARDIN into TED'S mouth. TED is wearing a dress shirt and tie, slacks, and dress shoes indicating he's left work to come to the dentist. He has a paper dental bib clipped to his collar.

DR. HARDIN stops humming.

DR. HARDIN
Well, partner, this is a real bag
of nails.

CUT TO:

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Outside TED'S mouth inside the Exam Room. TED is in the dentist chair. DR. HARDIN is sitting on a stool with a tray of dental tools next to him. He raises the surgical lamp that was hanging over TED a moment before and removes his dental glasses and sets them on the tool tray next to him.

TED
What? Bag of nails? Sure, it
feels like I have a nail in my
face, but what's wrong--...

DR. HARDIN cuts off TED'S question.

DR. HARDIN
Hearty as a buck.

A BEAT.

TED
Hearty as a buck...?

DR. HARDIN
Clinically, there's nothing wrong
with your tooth.

DR. HARDIN rolls to one side of the room to the counter and pulls x-rays from TED'S dental record, then rolls to the other side of the room where the x-ray light hangs on the wall and pops the x-ray into the frame.

DR. HARDIN
X-rays look good. No cavities.
No signs of festerin'. 'Bout alls
I can do for ya is prescribe some
painkillers. Best strap on your
spurs and see if we can ride out
the storm.

DR. HARDIN stands from his stool and walks back to the counter, opens a drawer and pulls a sample size tube of toothpaste as TED slowly climbs out of the dental chair and pulls the dental bib from his collar, wads it up, and tosses it in a trash can next to the door.

DR. HARDIN hands TED the tube of toothpaste.

DR. HARDIN
Probably just sensitive. See if
this toothpaste sets with ya. For
sensitive teeth.

An awkward extended BEAT passes as TED rubs his jaw hoping for more answers or clarity, and he and DR. HARDIN look at each other briefly. DR. HARDIN smiles then seems to remember the prescription he spoke of just moments before.

DR. HARDIN pulls a prescription pad and pen from his coat pocket, scribbles a prescription for some painkillers, then tears the slip of paper from the pad and hands it to TED.

DR. HARDIN
And if it's still hinderin' ya in
a couple-a days, well, won't ya
mosey on back down and see me.

DR. HARDIN claps TED on the shoulder and winks at him.

DR. HARDIN
Diane'll make you an appointment.

DR. HARDIN walks out of the room and continues whistling "CATTLE CALL" which turns into the Eddy Arnold recording and plays non-diegetically. The camera holds on a WIDE SHOT OF TED in the Exam Room for a couple of beats.

FADE TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - THAT EVENING

"CATTLE CALL" continues to play. We see the inside of the door of TED'S apartment. It's dark. A BEAT passes and we hear the door unlock as Ted walks in carefully, still holding his jaw in pain with his left hand. In his right hand is a white paper sack from the pharmacy. His laptop bag is slung over his left shoulder.

TED'S apartment is modest and clean. He makes a decent living--solid middle-class--doing something with data and solutions in a cube farm. The apartment is decorated with a few movie posters. TED has books. He's educated, intelligent, well-rounded, level-headed.

TED drops his laptop bag to the floor, uses his feet to slip off his shoes.

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He flicks on the lights, tosses the white paper sack on the counter and goes to the fridge where he grabs a beer then uses a bottle opener on the counter to open it.

He picks up the white paper sack and carries it and the beer to the living room. He appears weak and exhausted from the pain he's in.

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TED sits down on the couch, sets the beer on the coffee table, turns ON THE TV and rips open the white paper sack and removes the pill bottle.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP OF pill bottle which reads: "OXYCODONE. TAKE 1 FOR PAIN AS NEEDED. / DR. JOHN WESLEY HARDIN, D.D.S."

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT of TED on the couch as he opens the bottle, shakes out two pills and washes them down with beer. Eddy Arnold's "CATTLE CALL" ends.

FADE TO BLACK.

An EXTENDED BEAT passes.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

TED shoots straight up from lying asleep on the couch, in a cold sweat, pale. His shirt is untucked and unbuttoned. His tie is off. The TV is still on, playing an infomercial. TED screams in pain, clutching the left side of his jaw.

He gets up and stumbles to the bathroom.

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

TED flicks on the light and looks in the mirror. He carefully pulls the side of his mouth open to try to get a glimpse of the TOOTH that's causing him so much pain.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of the first molar on the left side of TED'S mouth. The tooth is perfect, white, and shiny. No fillings. No discoloration. No irritation of the gums. There is visibly nothing wrong with this tooth.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of TED at the bathroom mirror. TED puts a finger in his mouth and touches the TOOTH. He screams and curses in pain. He tries to wiggle the tooth, and lets out a hesitant sounding wimper on this attempt, and it doesn't move. It doesn't do anything but hurt more.

TED opens the bathroom mirror and takes out his toothbrush and the tiny tube of toothpaste DR. HARDIN gave him. He applies the toothpaste and begins to carefully brush his teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

WIDE SHOT of TED'S bedroom. TED is dressed for bed in a white undershirt and sweatpants. In spite of the increasing pain, he's going to attempt to fall asleep. He crawls into bed, and the last we see of TED on this day, he's lying on his right side staring at his alarm clock on the nightstand. He blinks and we CUT TO BLACK.

While in BLACK for an EXTENDED BEAT, we hear a brief, faint SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND. The sound is an annoying, irritating sound like a metal fork being scratched across a glass plate. This sound will only ever be heard by TED and the audience.

CUT TO:

INT. DATA SOLUTIONS OFFICE - NEXT DAY

We are in TED'S cube at the office. He has his laptop set up and his sack lunch is setting on his desk. We can hear the faint bustling of TED'S co-workers, phones ringing, and keyboards clicking in the background. TED is very pale and sweaty. He looks at the time on his phone.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of phone showing time of "11:30 a.m."

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT of TED in his cubicle. TED looks over at his lunch with fear in his eyes. TED'S toothache is even worse.

TED'S co-worker STEVE walks up to TED'S cube and catches him by surprise. STEVE is also late-20s and is pretty unsophisticated and immature. Both are in dress shirts, ties, slacks, and dress shoes.

STEVE

Damn, Ted! Tie one on last night?
Lookin' pretty rough, pal.

TED

Hey, Steve. It's this tooth. I
can't even chew anything. Dentist
says--...

STEVE cuts TED off.

STEVE

Didn't stop you from chewing that
hair pie with Emily from payroll.
I feel ya, bruh.

TED

Emily? What? We've only gone out
once. I'm telling you, man, my
tooth is fucked.

STEVE

It's probably mouth cancer or some
shit. Who was that actor that
said he got throat cancer from
eatin' pussy?

TED gets a sudden surge of intense pain and winces and holds his jaw.

TED

Geez! Fuck! I can't do this, man.

STEVE
You should probably go see your
dentist.

TED (SARCASTICALLY)
Oh yeah! My dentist! You know,
you're a pretty terrific person to
have around to help me with these
things! I'm glad you're here!

A BEAT.

TED
I already went. He said it looks
fine, but I'm going back tomorrow.

STEVE
It's probably just sensitive.

TED
You don't understand. This is no
ordinary toothache. I've been
eating Oxycodone like they're Tic-
Tacs. There's no abscess, no
cavity, and it keeps getting
worse. It's like if you took the
sensation of being kicked in balls
and passing kidney stones made of
ghost peppers while being made to
watch someone fuck your sister,
compressed it, made it into a
railroad spike and drove it into
your jaw.

STEVE pauses an EXTENDED BEAT, not sure what to say.

TED
What?!

STEVE
I was just thinking about your
sister.

TED
Fuck off.

A BEAT passes.

STEVE
Anyway, I was just coming by to
see if I could borrow your orbital
sander.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

I got couple of Tri-Delts coming over this weekend, and I really gotta get that bar I bought from Kam's looking good if I'm gonna score a menage. Know what I mean?

TED

Fine, whatever. Just come by tomorrow evening.

STEVE

Thanks, bruh.

STEVE EXITS. TED hears the SCRAPING / SCREECHING sound again, and this time it's more intense and he winces in even more pain, as his tooth is now worse than before.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Open on a sign that reads in old western style font "DR. JOHN W. HARDIN, D.D.S." We hold on the sign for a BEAT.

CUT TO:

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside the exam room TED is lying in the exam chair, and DR. HARDIN is preparing to do another exam. TED has left work early to see DR. HARDIN and is still dressed in his usual work clothes. DR. HARDIN is dressed in similar cowboy attire we saw him in earlier, and is sitting in a rolling stool looking at TED'S file on the counter.

DR. HARDIN

Well, happy birthday, partner!

TED

What?

DR. HARDIN looks up from the file to TED.

DR. HARDIN

Happy birthday. Says here it's yer birthday.

DR. HARDIN rolls over next to TED.

DR. HARDIN

Let me get my toothin' irons here and we'll have a looksee.

TED opens his mouth as DR. HARDIN looks inside.

DR. HARDIN
Got 'ny big birthday plans?

TED mumbles a response with his mouth open that DR. HARDIN seems to understand.

DR. HARDIN
Well, probably oughta stay away
from the birthday cake.

DR. HARDIN continues to examine the TOOTH, humming "RED RIVER VALLEY" as he does.

DR. HARDIN
I just don't see anything the
matter. Right as rain, partner.

DR. HARDIN sits back on his stool. TED closes his mouth.

DR. HARDIN
Say it's still throbbin' like a
blue-jay's ass, huh?

TED
Yes. Just like that. Blue-jay's
ass.

TED HEARS the SCREECHING SOUND again and winces in pain.

TED
And I keep hearing this awful
sound.

DR. HARDIN
Hell, I had a patient once, said
his fillings could pick up a radio
station outside of Addis Ababa.
Said he knew about the first Gulf
War before Dan Rather.

The two sit quietly and awkwardly for a moment.

TED
You gotta help me, doc. Is there
anything you can do with...your
'toothin' irons'?

DR. HARDIN
I can pull it. Yank that rascal
outta there faster 'an a scalded
haint.

TED
Great! Do that, then! Just make
it stop!

DR. HARDIN gets up from his stool to get more tools ready, as well as a syringe and a vile of Novocaine.

DR. HARDIN prepares the Novocaine syringe.

DR. HARDIN
I'll stick you with a dose of this
panther piss, and you won't feel a
thing.

DR. HARDIN dons his surgical glasses again and moves in to TED'S jaw.

DR. HARDIN
Now, this'll burn a little, but
don't fret.

TED opens his mouth. DR. HARDIN injects TED'S gums with the Novocaine and continues humming.

A few BEATS pass and DR. HARDIN removes the syringe and looks at his watch.

DR. HARDIN
Should start to take hold of ya
any second.

TED
Can't feel a thing.

DR. HARDIN picks up a small tool that looks like a little screwdriver from his tray of tools.

DR. HARDIN
Alrighty, partner, dig in yer
spurs and lets uncork this bronco.

TED opens his mouth again as DR. HARDIN takes the dental tool, places it on the tooth in question, and with all his weight, slowly leans as hard as he can on it in effort to simply pop the tooth out.

As DR. HARDIN begins doing this, TED painfully moans, and the longer and more intense DR. HARDIN leans on the tooth, TED'S moan turns into a blood-curdling scream. TED very clearly again, hears the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND that he thought he noticed the day before. This time it is very loud and very screechy.

The tooth does not move, and DR. HARDIN finally backs off. TED is still moaning in pain.

DR. HARDIN
Whoo, doggie!
(MORE)

DR. HARDIN (CONT'D)
That son of a gun is locked up
tighter than Dick's hat-band.

DR. HARDIN picks up a drill from his tray of tools.

DR. HARDIN
Don't you worry, partner. He
won't buck me a second time.

We hear the WHURRRRRRR of the drill as DR. HARDIN moves in to attempt to drill out TED'S tooth.

We hear it hit the tooth, and TED begins to scream again. And again, TED hears the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND he'd heard before.

DR. HARDIN drills on the tooth for several seconds, and is completely unsuccessful.

He finally stops the drill and removes it from TED'S mouth.

He looks at the tooth and pauses because he is completely baffled.

DR. HARDIN
What in Sam Hill...?

CUT TO:
CLOSE-UP of TED'S TOOTH. It sets perfectly in place, still as white, shiny, and perfect as it was the day it broke through TED's gums. The SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND has subsided some and is intermittent.

CUT TO:
MEDIUM SHOT of TED and DR. HARDIN. DR. HARDIN places his finger in TED'S mouth and touches the tooth.

TED screams and hears a quick, louder, intense BEAT of the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND again.

DR. HARDIN uses the drill on TED'S tooth again. And again, the drilling, the screaming, the scraping.

CUT TO:
Another CLOSE-UP of TED'S TOOTH, and it still looks as perfect as before.

CUT TO:
MEDIUM SHOT of TED and DR. HARDIN again.

DR. HARDIN
Well, I never seen such. Ain't a
scratch on it.

DR. HARDIN removes his cowboy hat for a few BEATS and scratches his head. TED is still clearly in pain and exhausted from the experience. He watches DR. HARDIN with concern and worry.

DR. HARDIN
Not sure what else I can do for
you here, partner.

DR. HARDIN, in an epiphany, pops his HAT back on his head and snaps his fingers.

He gets up from his stool, walks over to a bulletin board on the wall and plucks a business card from it.

DR. HARDIN walks back over to TED to hand him the card.

DR. HARDIN
Probably best if I refer you to
one of my distinguished
colleagues.

CUT TO:
CLOSE-UP of business card being handed to TED. The business card reads: "DR. W. WILLIAM HICKOK, D.M.D / ORAL SURGEON."

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LATER

TED rushes home from the dentist. He bursts through the door, clutching his jaw moaning frantically in pain. He immediately drops his laptop and kicks off his shoes in a hurry.

TED also begins to strip off all his clothes down to his boxers, leaving a trail of clothes to the hallway closet.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Once he gets to the hallway closet, TED opens the door and gets out his toolbox. He very hurriedly opens it and pulls a screwdriver and hammer from inside.

TED then goes into the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

TED sets the screwdriver and hammer on the toilet next to the bathtub. Next, TED opens the bathroom cabinet and grabs a hand mirror.

TED frantically climbs into the bathtub with the mirror in hand, because what he's about to do is going to be a bloody mess. Once he's seated, he grabs the screwdriver from where he'd placed it on the toilet earlier.

Using the hand mirror to see inside his mouth, TED uses his other hand to carefully position the screwdriver on the TOOTH that's causing so much pain.

He winces and moans in dread as he does this.

TED then puts the hand mirror down in the bathtub, and keeping the screwdriver in position with his one hand, TED uses his other hand to reach over and grab the hammer from the toilet.

TED carefully taps the handle of the screwdriver with the hammer to make sure his aim is going to be precise.

He again moans in dread and begins to fret on the verge of tears.

And with his mouth open, screwdriver placed on the TOOTH, hammer poised to strike the screwdriver, TED counts to three with his mouth open.

TED

One

A BEAT.

TED

Two.

A LONGER BEAT, and TED fretting in fear.

TED

Three.

And as hard as he can, TED strikes the screwdriver with the hammer as hard as he can, striking the TOOTH.

However, the TOOTH is not harmed and doesn't budge, causing the screwdriver to slip off and go right through the side of TED'S cheek splatting blood on the side of the bathtub wall. Blood is pouring from TED'S face.

TED wails in agony.

And suddenly TED hears the now familiar SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND incessantly. It's not one long, constant sound, but instead plays like morse code and has a very jagged consistency. As if it's now trying to speak to TED.

TED clutches his bleeding face in pain, now crying, and hurting more than ever before.

He picks up the hand mirror from the floor of the bathtub, and holds it up to see the TOOTH he attempted to extract.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP of the blood splattered hand mirror to see the TOOTH still perfectly in place and unaltered. TED hears the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND as he looks at the TOOTH in the mirror.

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT of TED as he tosses down the hand mirror, and holding his bleeding face, he scrambles out of the bathtub and over to the medicine cabinet above the sink.

TED opens the medicine cabinet and grabs the first aid kit.

He frantically opens it, spilling half the contents to get to the gauze and bandage tape.

TED closes the medicine cabinet to use its mirrored front. He's trembling in pain and fear. He's covered in blood. The SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND doesn't stop.

TED, with bloody, trembling hands haphazardly bandages his bleeding face and stuffs gauze inside his mouth.

The SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND begins to take form. It's more specific, and TED begins to understand it. We don't understand it, but TED does, and we see it speaking to him in SUBTITLES.

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
...--ander...

TED is taken aback by this understanding. He is the only one aside from us, the audience, who has been able to hear this sound, but he doesn't know where it's coming from.

TED
What is that sound!? Why won't it stop!?

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
...--ander fo--...

TED
Who the fuck's there?!

TED looks out into the hallway.

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
...--ander... ...Ste--...

TED
Where the fuck are you?!

A BEAT passes and TED goes back into the bathroom and grabs the hammer he was using earlier.

TED
I don't have time for this
bullshit!

TED walks down the HALLWAY and into the LIVING ROOM.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
...--for...--eve...

TED
Fuck this.

TED begins to tear his place apart--like Harry Caul in "THE CONVERSATION" looking for the sound/voice he's hearing. This goes on in MONTAGE for a minute or two as TED rips apart his couch, takes apart cabinets, pulls up floor boards, and knocks holes in walls with the hammer he had earlier.

As he tears his place apart, TED begins to understand more of what he's hearing.

Finally, the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND forms a clear sentence to TED, and repeats it over and over.

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
Sander for Steve.

Suddenly, we hear a knock on the door as TED is reminded that STEVE is coming by to borrow his orbital sander. TED immediately ceases the destruction of his apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

In a catatonic-like gaze, TED goes to the door. The SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND still repeating in SUBTITLE:

TOOTH
(in Scraping subtitle)
Sander for Steve. Sander for
Steve. Sander for Steve.

TED OPENS the door to find STEVE standing there.

STEVE
Whooooa, buddy! What the fuck
happened to you!?

TED mumbles curses, turns and goes back to the LIVING ROOM.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

STEVE follows him and observes the disaster before him and curses under his breath.

STEVE
You know you really didn't have to
clean up just for me.

The TOOTH continues to repeat its phrase over and over. The SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND is still audible to TED and the audience.

TED, in a calmly maddened state, walks down the hallway to the hallway closet he went into earlier.

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

STEVE, who clearly just wants to get the orbital sander and get out, tries just being his usual self and avoids bringing up TED'S face or his apartment again. STEVE slowly follows TED to the closet.

STEVE
Thanks for the loaner, man. This
thing is gonna look great once I'm
done with it. You should see
these chicks, too, man. Tina and
Mary: one of 'em's shaved, the
other one's hairy. Know what I
mean?

TED reaches the closet where his tools are and starts digging for the sander. STEVE continues his tapestry of filth, and as he does the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND continues:

STEVE

The only reason I got that bar in the first place was for fuckin'. I mean, sure we'll have some drinks, but dude, that bar is a bona-fide panty-dropper. I figure we'll have some drinks, fuck around some. Hell, I'd bring 'em by but you look like you're, uh, in the middle of a, uh, situation. But anyway, I should have it back to you in a day or so. So, I'll just grab that sander from you an--...

TOOTH

(in Scraping subtitle)
 Sander for Steve. Sander for Steve. Sander for Steve.
 Sander for... Sander for...
 Sand for... Sander for...
 Sand. Sand. Sand. Steve.
 Sand. Sand. Steve. Sand
 Steve. Sand Steve. Sand
 Steve. Sand Steve. Sand
 Steve. Sand Steve. Sand
 Steve. Sand Steve. Sand
 Steve's face off. Sand
 Steve's face off. Sand
 Steve's face off. Sand
 Steve's face off.

And as TED locates the battery powered orbital sander, TED heed's the TOOTH'S instruction, and in a burst of rage as STEVE rambles on, TED whips around with the sander in hand and rams the SANDER into STEVE'S face, full throttle, sanding STEVE'S face off.

STEVE screams, TED screams, and BLOOD SPLATTERS everywhere.

Once STEVE is dead, TED finally stops the sander, and we no longer hear the TOOTH'S SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND.

TED realizes he no longer hears the SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND, and his TOOTH has stopped hurting. He even sticks his finger in his mouth to touch it and there is no pain.

TED screams and laughs with excitement, quickly ignoring dead, faceless STEVE lying on the floor.

TED (JOYFULLY)

Steve, you magnificent bastard!

TED drops the sander on STEVE, picks up STEVE'S ragged, sanded head and kisses the spot that was his forehead. TED then heads for the KITCHEN.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

TED takes a beer from the fridge, pops the bottle top off the bottle on the edge of the counter and satisfyingly trots to the LIVING ROOM, laughing the whole way.

CUT TO:

INT. TED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TED sits on what remains of his couch, half naked, covered in blood, with a badly bandaged hole in his face, and attempts to drink his beer as best he can considering his injury, spilling half of it down himself.

We hold on this for an EXTENDED BEAT, then CUT TO BLACK.

And we hear the TOOTH'S SCRAPING / SCREECHING SOUND AGAIN.

Bob Dylan's "JOHN WESLEY HARDING" plays as the credits roll.

FADE OUT.

THE END.