

I burst through the garage door, rush into the bathroom, hunch over, and blood waterfalls out of my mouth and into the sink. Peering up from the crimson Charybdis, a grisly reflection of myself maintains frightening eye-contact. Bloodstained gauze jacks up my cheeks into a "...you wanna know how I got these scars?" pose; at this point, I'm almost eager for the loopiness I'd heard so much about.

Wisdom teeth extraction and squeamishness do not pair well. Before I suited up with my fancy adult-bib, Dad and the surgeon were shooting the breeze: "So I don't want to say my son passes out at the sight of blood or anything, but that would describe it entirely accurately..."

My surgery was scheduled for the Friday of first semester finals week, in January of my senior year. I'd managed to move my exams around so that it wouldn't be an issue, and then I'd have the four day weekend (more for the teachers to finish grading than for students to recover) to recover. Other than the part where a masked man drilled into my head and violently tore pieces out through the front of my face (squeamishness and restless nights do not pair well), everything was shaping up nicely. An especially optimistic part of me was even sure that I would be fine for the big, all-day scholastic "scho" bowl tournament on Saturday.

At the beginning of the varsity season, my coach pulled me and the other co-captain aside and asked for tournament suggestions. Attending that particular weekend's competition was my idea, and I couldn't wait. Apparently my teeth couldn't either, and the surgery quickly became a now-or-now deal. I was going to have to learn to love mashed potatoes and ice cream right away. Irrationally, I spent time reading through my extensive notes from two scho bowl summer camps (proud to be a nerd) and studied up on "random facts", none of which pertained to dentistry.

So after weeks of mental preparation and advanced conditioning - or none of that, to be a bit more accurate - the day arrived. My finals week had seemingly gone well, and at least this

would all be over soon enough: "Now count back from 100, Danny, and don't worry, this will all be over soon enough." *Yeah, sure, Doctor. That's what they always say in movies and TV shows, but does it really work like - alright, how did I get here? Oh, damn. I just did that. Way to be original, Danny.* "How are you feeling?" Not bad, actually; thanks, Mom! *Wait, what? Did the surgeon get overeager and stitch my whole mouth shut?*

Waking up, I remember the chair creaking, my shoes squeaking, and the brilliant rays of sunlight piercing through, rendering my vision as red as the bathroom sink would soon end up. Shining through the misaligned, slightly chipped away blinds, a curious X marked a spot in the corner of the room. The cramped, clinically clean, dentist-office-white room was full of people not looking for buried treasure. I left with the nurse, walking past spare *ER* sets and 360°, radioactive headgear. The sound of hot chocolate percolating in the glass-walled waiting room provided the illusion of a giant pet store fish tank. Across the hall, I waited in a small kennel of a room, on an elementary school nurse's couch, for Mom and Dad to take me home.

Actually, no. I don't remember any of that. After I reached "96", Mom and Dad took over in the small room. By the time the post-op paperwork was finally filed away, I could ever-so-slightly feel my jaw. By the time we made it home, I could move my mouth just enough to rupture the protective lockjaw dam. I *do* remember all of that, and that Joker image is emblazoned across my mind's eye (and the poster on my bedroom door, which makes for a friendly reminder). Once I made it to the recovery room, some synaptic switch clicked into place and my IV-induced anterograde amnesia faded away. My version of *Memento* would be an awfully exciting film - a ticket-buys-the-whole-seat-but-you'll-only-need-the-edge experience: me stumbling down a hallway, walking off my stupor. Theaters would be inundated with barely-eaten bags of popcorn and gory piñata lynching remnants, however, with a film so brief: "Gotta

say, Danny, you're pretty lucky here. I'm not even going to have to give you the medication for swelling, and it seems like you're doing well with the anesthesia wearing off."

During the car ride home, my thoughts swirled like soap bubbles around a drain. I ended up reminiscing about my family's recent trip to London. On our first day, we went to watch the changing of the guard. In the midst of the ceremony, the royal band went through their expertly choreographed marching. Arriving in the designated spot, with their audience watching from the Victoria Memorial, they began to play. The notes floated leisurely through the air like crumpet crumbs atop a cuppa tea. A lovely rendition of "Stayin' Alive" evoked surprised, jetlagged laughter, instead of the anticipated Union Jack. The changing of the gauze is far less festive.

After that first "yeah, but you should see the other guy" experience, the flashflood warning was called off. After tentatively dipping our toes at first, Dad and I eventually got the rhythm down: gloves on, say "ahh", out with the red, in with the new. After a couple episodes, we had time to spare during Netflix's "15 seconds before next episode starts". Season finales and pancakes for dinner *do* pair well.

So after hours of oral recovery and advanced TV binging - a lot of that, to be accurate - the day had passed. My surgery had seemingly gone well and this was all over soon enough: soon enough that I could go to the tournament the next day. "...you're doing well with the anesthesia wearing off." *Yes!* "But just to be safe..." *No!* "...try to lay low, just 'til Sunday. That won't be a problem, will it?"

Honestly, and this is kind of hard to put into words that aren't boring, just before bed Friday night, I turned to (bubblegum-flavored) drugs. The boring (read: factual) words are more like, "I took my antibiotic medicine, as per the instructions." Anyway, I struggled to ignore the irony in how the syringe draining the pinkish fluid out of the plastic canister mirrored the reddish

fluid draining out of my face when I heard the doctor's words. With my head tilted back, I shot up right there at the kitchen counter. My parents were getting ready for bed: I was utterly alone in the dark until, out of nowhere, pure fridge-white light filled my vision. After all, the pharmacist insisted the antibiotic be kept chilled and the syringe rinsed thoroughly after drinking the required dose. When I went upstairs and told my parents what I'd done, they didn't find my joke quite as funny as I did. I promised, truthfully, that I wasn't actually doing drugs, and never have.

My tornado siren of an alarm clock shook me out of bed, just in time to get ready to meet at the high school and board the bus. When I told my parents later that day, they found it much funnier than I did. Following that rocky start, Saturday ended up a lot like Friday evening. We backed down to switching the gauze after every couple of episodes, Mom made eggs for lunch, and I played around with the dogs (one-handed, the other preemptively covering my face). In the back of my mind, the packets of trivia I had pored over drifted about, with no place to go. Silver lining: I merely pored over them, rather than poured blood over them. I guess one could say I'd patched the holes in my head with European literature and SI Units.

Excited texts from a friend on the team served as periodic reminders, adding insult to almost-imperceptible injury. I had done my best to not make too much of them, putting my phone aside and spending the day with my family. Until I got the final one, that is: "danny did u see coachs tweet" [sic]. Unable to help myself, I pulled up his Twitter page on my phone. I couldn't tell you what was happening on the TV, for my eyes were plastered to a different screen. My coach, trophy in hand, with the truncated starting line-up standing like F/A-18s doing a "missing-man" flypast: "#wedontneeddanny". Oh, and the high school retweeted it, caption included.