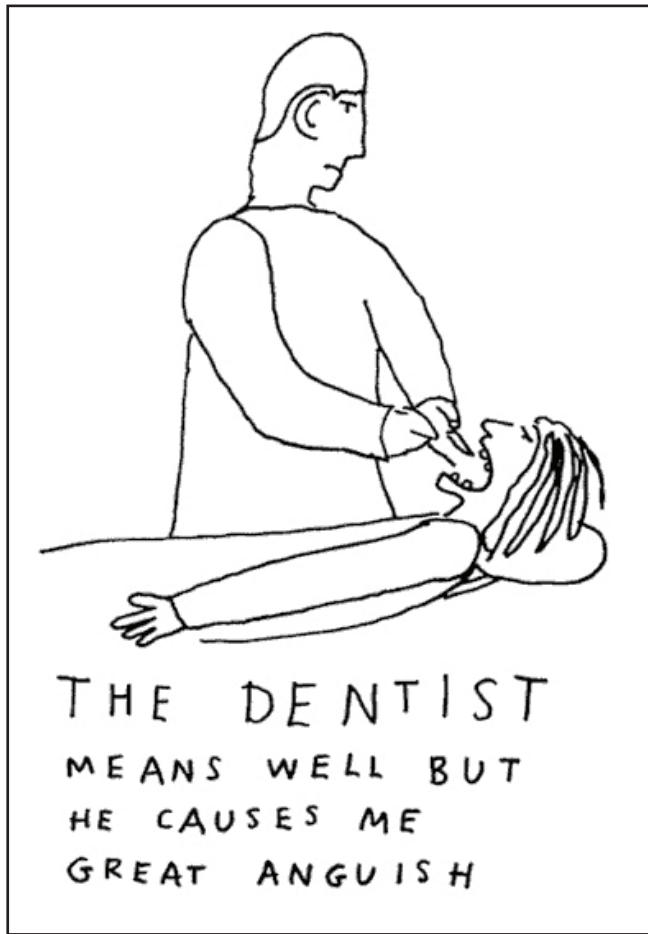


# The Dentist

from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien



“The dentist couldn’t find any problem, but Lemon kept insisting, so the man finally shrugged and shot in the Novocain and yanked out a perfectly good tooth. There was some pain, no doubt, but in the morning Curt Lemon was all smiles.”

In *The Dentist* O’Brien tells us a story that is simultaneously about courage, cowardice, and Curt Lemon. He writes that “...it’s easy to get sentimeal about the dead and to guard against that I want to tell a quick Curt Lemon story,” (86). Is that really his only purpose in telling this story?

- What purpose does this story serve in the novel? In other words, why is it here?

**HINT:** Consider the placement of this vignette in the novel, immediately after *How to Tell a True War Story*.

- Also, does this story serve to paint Curt Lemon as courageous, cowardly, or something else entirely?

- How do the themes of courage and cowardice depicted here compare with other depictions of these themes in other chapters?

**HINT:** Consider O’Brien’s statements about himself in *On the Rainy River*.