

Alternative Medicine

By Nitin Jagdish

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There was a time when I was open to alternative medicine.

Many summers ago, back when atheism didn't frighten me, in the middle of celebrating a friend's birthday, I raised my arm to the sky and asked, "Does my armpit smell like urine?"

"No. Did you put some on your armpit?" the Birthday Boy asked.

"I dabbed a bit on this skin tag. Don't worry, it's my own urine."

"Shit Winston, why do you try so hard to be strange?"

"I'm not trying to be strange. A neighbor lent an article that said urine could be used to treat skin problems. It seemed worth a shot."

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Now, I'm not so open to alternative medicine.

Lisha, my love, lectures again. "St. John's Wort helped Chloe a lot. Meditation, too. You shouldn't dismiss it so quickly."

I roll my eyes, again.

"I know you're tired of hearing it, Winston, but you can't trust in Big Pharma all the time. Dr. Alvarez has prescribed every possible pill and you still feel sad," she replies.

Five weeks ago, the Missouri River stopped and whistled at me as I stood above it. I remember it saying, “Oh Winston dear, Winston baby, look at me. Look at me and see yourself clearly. See how all those pills do not a wisp of good for you. You cry in the library. You cry in the grocery store. The other day, that dowager took pity and paid for your coffee. She knew Winston Benoit’s still the saddest of the sad men in the greater Kansas City area. Medication is the noxious leprechaun who’ll ditch you at the wrong end of the rainbow.

“So come, Winston, come. Loosen your grip. Let go. Jump. You will forget everything.”

I grasped the earth and didn’t relax until a cop pried me back to his car.

But back to the now.

“You know, Lisha, I’ve read a few articles about depressives who killed themselves following Chloe’s plan.”

“Why can’t you read the articles I give you? What do you have against homeopathic medicine?”

“I can’t explain it because you won’t understand and you never will understand, and if you could understand you would die of shame.”

She smacks me.

Waiting many seconds, using a biofeedback trick and prayer to soothe my stinging cheek, but knowing I'll rub my face once Lisha leaves forever, I raise an eyebrow and reply, "Those ginseng and bee pollen cocktails really truly calm you, dear."

"Go fuck yourself, Winston."

Alternative medicine has killed our relationship.