

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

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Excerpt from JESUS NEEDED MEDICATION

The day hospital was like school, but with people constantly complaining about their lives. We went to therapy groups all day long. We went to two in the morning, then lunch, then two in the afternoon. My favorites were the music and arts and crafts groups, because we didn't have to get too personal.

The first group of the day was the introduction. Everyone had to go around and say what they did the night before, and if it was Monday, say what they did on the weekend. I hated this more than anything. I didn't want to tell these people what I did with my life. So I lied.

"Colleen, what did you do last night?" the mousy group leader, Tina, asked me. Tina was nicer than some of them.

I put my hands in the pocket of my jacket. "Well, last night, I had meatloaf and mashed potatoes for dinner, and me and my friend Jen went to the arcade and hung out."

"Aren't arcades bad places to be?" Tina asked. She didn't know that there weren't any real arcades in Walden; they were all in bowling alleys.

"No, they're not bad. It depends on who you talk to. There was this guy there who was huge and bald and wore a necklace made of barbed wire, but we didn't talk to him."

"I don't know if it's a good idea to hang out there," Tina said.

"I don't know if anything is a good idea," I said. I liked lying. It made me feel good. Like I could one up these people.

"Doug, what did you do last night?" Tina said.

"I went home and I watched TV," he said. "Nothing good was on, so I kept flipping the channels. Then I went to bed."

"That's certainly more positive than what Colleen did, but I think you can do better than that. You should be around people. Do you remember the motto, I need people? It's true."

I wondered why we never got to ask what the people running the groups what they did when they got home. If we did, we would find out that they went home and drank a bottle of wine, then smoked two joints. The men would go to the strip club and the women would run screaming into the night.

One day in a group called "Anger Pain and Fear," the leader Jack asked what we did when we were afraid.

"I don't get afraid that often," I said. "I know things that other people don't know. I can feel God in my blood. I'm close to God."

"No, you're not, I'm the one that's close to God," said a woman with hair hanging in front of her face. "I'm Jesus."

"Now, whoa, you both can't be Jesus," Jack said.

"I'm the chosen one," the woman said. "I'm the savior."

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"And how do you go about saving the world?" I said. "What do you do?"

"Well, the world is so horrible that there's no way I can save it," she said. "That's why I get so upset. I see these people on TV and they're so disgusting baring their bodies and shaking their asses."

"If you were Jesus, you wouldn't use words like that," Jack said.

"How do you know what Jesus would do?" she said.

Obviously she wasn't the One. The real Jesus wouldn't spend her time watching TV and worrying about mundane things when the Savior should worry about other, more important things. Besides, the woman was too old to be the savior of the Universe. If she was, why hadn't she saved it by now?

She didn't know about the twelve steps and just for today. She didn't see God look into her face in Russia. I did.

I was the daughter of God, I was convinced. The more I listened to these people, the more I knew I was the one.

In another group, a woman with glasses and small eyes cried and cried about her boyfriend breaking up with her. She worked at a different psychiatric hospital and she did the same job as the counselors who ran the groups.

I thought that if someone ran groups like this, they were supposed to be above it all, not to be fazed by their own trauma. They were supposed to be robots. If her boyfriend broke up with her, she was supposed to use the tools she taught other people to cope with things like that. She was weak.

"I can't believe it, he came over last night and we started talking, then intimacy occurred," she said. I didn't want to hear this. Her boyfriend broke up with her, then she had sex with him and we're supposed to feel sorry for her? Does she want pity? What does she want?

"I don't know if that's appropriate to talk about with the group," Tina said.

The woman cried. "It was so horrible. Then he just left. He said it's still over. What an asshole. How can he do that?"

I sighed. I wanted to be lost in my own thoughts rather than listen to people wail. I was glad that I only came on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and I didn't have to deal with the drama five days a week.

"You have to find something to do," the people in the day hospital told me over and over. They didn't understand I had plenty to do, with saving the world and everything that goes along with that. They wanted me to get a job, but I wasn't qualified to do anything except to be a cashier, or work in a restaurant, because that's what people with high school diplomas did.

"When I leave, I'll get a job," I told Tina. "How can I work when I'm in here, too?" I thought that made sense. How could I work when I had to listen to these assholes three days a week?

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I got out of day treatment in the middle of March, the week before St. Patrick's Day. A burden was lifted off my back. I felt like I was about to fly away somewhere I always wanted to go. I dreamed about flying and in my dreams, I swam in the air above the cars and telephone poles and houses. I could do anything I wanted in my dreams, and I wanted to bring that feeling to real life. I wanted to escape the world and fly to the moon.