



# Query

**M**edication. I hate taking it.

Never mind for what; it doesn't matter. What I hate is taking it.

Why?

Embodied in a small, yellow capsule is the summa of my infirmity. In that capsule is the entirety of what I cannot accomplish on my own, my inability to cope with the world on its terms, my ailment that requires palliation, not cure.

I take pills. I have joined the ranks of pill-takers. I have crossed the threshold from health into illness, and all there is to do is to take a pill.

Do I sound bitter? Perhaps that is because of the bitter pill I swallow, every morning.

I know, the irony is rich: prescribing medication is my job, I do it a dozen times a day. In no way do I preface each of these scripts with, "Medication sucks, and I'd understand if you didn't take it. After all, it is the embodiment of your illness." I wouldn't be helping anyone with that kind of preface. As a doctor, I know when someone needs a drug; convincing them that they need pharmaceutical help is part of the job, winning them over is an art.

I know that illness isn't a moral failing, it's not a judgement of me as a person, yet in some profound way I equate taking that pill with weakness, with incompleteness. The pill as crutch.

There's another sinister aspect of the pill. If, according to my thinking, it truly is my illness, it is the representation of that illness, its effigy, then I can banish that same illness by not taking my pills. I can unmake my disease by denying it. I can wake up in the morning and make a choice: I can not take a pill today. Ergo: I can choose not to be sick today.

Dangerous, eh? Part of me knows that the pill is just a pill, it's not a symbol. Part of me knows that I can't triumph over my disease by becoming an ostrich. I'll still have a chronic illness, one that will get worse if left untreated.

Yet the myth of the pill is so powerful, I prefer to think in this simplistic way. The pill's to blame. And so, it's true, I "go off" my despised drug, and the shame is: I feel nothing. Nothing happens. The days are the same, drug or no drug. But then my illness is silent until it builds and then there is a crisis. So this practice actually reinforces my thinking. Nothing happened, after all, and the lesson is: I don't need this stuff. Until ... bad things happen and I once again think I need this stuff. But only just as long as I need to get well, and then it becomes ... optional. This cycle repeats.

I've tried telling myself what I tell noncompliant patients, that there is an honour in trying to get well, that taking medication is a kind of determination to get better, that there are consequences to noncompliance like complications and morbidity and even mortality. It doesn't work. Part of me wants to hate the pill for what it both is and isn't — which are both the same thing, really: a reminder of the fact that I'm ill.

— *Dr. Ursus*