

Tea and (Not Much) Sympathy



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→ **Robert E. Horseman, DDS**

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD

Elizabeth and Agnes; you gotta love ‘em! These octogenarian patients of mine have much in common. They are both flyweights whose combined weights fall more than 50 pounds short of my own. In specialty shops they would be petites, but in my eyes they are just plain wiry. The two are widows generously favored with that fierce independence and generosity of spirit some women are able to project even if being the beneficiary of a six-figure insurance policy wasn’t their lot.

Elizabeth and Agnes don’t know each other, have never met, but they should, although I would never give them appointments back-to-back. They share a fervent appreciation and special knowledge of nutrition with a subspecialty of health foods like those found only in shops catering to the anti-fat-grease-sugar-carbo crowd.

Like many healthy people, the ladies

feel perfectly at ease offering me unsolicited advice. “Been hitting the bean dip a little heavy, eh, Doctor?” Agnes offered during a recent appointment. She tapped my belt buckle knowingly with a bony forefinger. “Are you taking your flaxseed regularly?” “Flaxseed?”

“Of course! Flaxseed regularly for regularity if you get my drift,” she explained. “Colon cancer, hemorrhagic fever, eyelid ptosis and Achilles heel among other things. Where’ve you been?”

“I use Metamucil, the orange-flavored, No. 1 doctor-recommended 100 percent psyllium fiber choice of my peer group,” I declared, my seamed cheeks glowing like pippins.

“Wrong!” Agnes bleated. “Flaxseed is where it’s at. Write that down!” I did.

Not long afterward, Elizabeth was in.

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"What's wrong with your eyes," she questioned, peering at me closely.

"Nothing," I answered, "I just wear these glasses to see with."

"Well, you have the rheumy, bloodshot eyes of an 86-year-old man," she stated with lofty disregard for my humorous retort.

"I am an 86-year-old man," I whimpered, trying to summon my lifelong gift of retaining my aplomb under stress.

"Then get yourself some grape seed, Doctor, and use it. I declare, I don't know how you ever got through dental school!"

I don't either, but that's beside the point. I decided to get a second opinion and called Agnes.

"Of course get yourself the grape seed. It's good for regional fatigue," she confirmed.

"You mean retinal fatigue?"

"Whatever. Be sure you're drinking four 8-ounce cups of green tea a day while you're at it."

"I drink iced tea with lemon and a packet of some petroleum-based sweetener,"

"Oh, my God!" she brayed. "I don't know how you ever got through dental school! Let me tell you about green tea."

Forty-five minutes later when she dismissed me, her lips parched with rhetoric, I knew more about green tea than I ever wanted to know. According to my source, it is the universal cure-all for every affliction known to mankind. I did not know that.

The proprietor of the health food store knew he had a live one when I hurried in anxious to sever my ties with coffee and Diet Pepsi.

His eyes grew pensive. "There are 761 kinds of green tea, Ace. You wanna be a little more specific?" He awaited my answer much as a barista in Starbucks would when asked for a "cup of coffee."

"No, no," I pleaded, knuckling my forelock in obsiescense. "Just give me a box of each and I'll be on my way."

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Today I have had my 14th cup of green tea. How the green tea craze assumed cult proportions remains a mystery. Most of them tasted like distilled alfalfa. A few of the other offerings seemed to be an amalgamation of

bean sprouts and something called maté rooiboost, a substance much favored by certain species of birds in the Guayaki rainforest of Paraguay. Doctored up with a generous squirt of Hershey's chocolate syrup and an ounce or two of half-and-half, they are palatable if not actually a substitute for tap water.

As one prone to wintry reflections and disappointment with anything not instantly effective, I believe 14 cups of this miracle libation should have produced something epochal by now. My mirror says no. I'll consult with Elizabeth and Agnes again and get back to you. ■■■■