

Tattoo Removal . . . So it goes

by Jason_Love

Once upon a time I drank so much tequila that I lost track of ... what's that called ... consciousness. Next morning, I couldn't remember a thing.

Fortunately, the tattoo would jar my memory.

The "tribal band" circled my left bicep like a serial bee sting, the om symbol thirteen times. Om is supposed to reveal the fleeting nature of reality. I had decided to honor it with a PERMANENT MARK.

Every tattoo should say the same thing -- "I'm an idiot." That way, when you wake up ten years later and wonder what you were thinking, the answer is right there.

So, yes, all these years after The Tequila Incident, I decided to zap the tattoo.

Dr. Seuss warned me about this way back in kindergarten. The Sneetches, you see, wanted stars on their bellies until everyone else got stars on their bellies and then they all just wanted to be the way they were. That's when Sylvester McMonkey McBean stepped in with his star-off machine.

"I'll make you again the best Sneetches on beaches, and all it will cost you is ten dollars eaches."

These days tattoo removal costs more than ten dollars eaches. Let's just say that you could see a sizable chunk of this world and, depending on the ruble, possibly others.

Doctor's Office

I arrived at the clinic feeling queasy as before a big performance. It wasn't quite butterflies but worms. Tequila worms. Fortunately, Dr. Kaufman was smooth like Harry Connick, Jr. He didn't ask where I got the tattoo, how much it cost, or more obviously, Why am I such an idiot?

Kaufman injected my om's with epinephrine, cocaine for your skin. He advised me not to look down, because then I would see -- AH! Blood trickling! Arm in danger! Request backup!

Kaufman distracted me with talk about laser technology. Turns out that black tattoos respond better than color because the ruby stone ... something something different wavelengths ... I'm sorry, the man was STICKING ME WITH NEEDLES.

The point is that if you get a tattoo, go with black. I recommend the peel-off kind you find at the grocery store. Reapply every morning for ten years, and then, if you're still interested, get it done professionally. Whatever you do, steer clear of lovers' names.

"The problem with tattoos," he says, "is that they last longer than most relationships."

During the Tequila Incident, I watched a girl ink the words "Leo's Playground" right onto her bikini line. Even as she winced in pain, Leo was eyeing someone else's playground. So it goes.

Kaufman handed me a pair of laser-proof, Stevie Wonder glasses and got busy blasting the pigment, which my skin would, doctor's words, "gobble up over time."

The laser beam tittered on my arm like a New Year's party favor, and the room filled with that electric smell you get when you pour milk into the toaster and then get spanked by your mom who still hasn't heard your side of the story.

"That's the laser penetrating your skin," said Kaufman, humming like Harry Connick, Jr.

I couldn't hear him over my mantra: "Om ... om ... om ..."

The Journey

Dr. Kaufman said the removal could take eight to ten visits, a chunk of the world indeed. Appointments were two months apart to give my skin time to digest. Here are some diary highlights, one from each month along the way.

Month 1: Arm puffed up like bloody marshmallow. Using it to scare the neighborhood children.

Month 2: Ink still bubbling up. Can't stop popping blisters despite the doctor's 16 warnings.

Month 3: Arm is like a grouchy old man that demands to be scratched all hours of the night.

Month 4: Markings still black. Little evidence of how many rubles I've spent.

Month 5: Tattoo taking on moth-eaten appearance. Should disappear by the time I'm 652.

Month 6: Want to peel off my skin and scratch the bones.

Month 7: Itching, itching, itching. Did I mention the itching?

Month 8: Progress slow like passing bill through Congress.

Month 9: Outline still dark. Insides hollowing out. Considering amputation.

Month 10: Tattoo peeling away like flakes of black Crayola. Can't stop picking, even when I draw blood.

Month 11: Maybe removing Sanskrit is like defiling a crypt and we've cursed my unborn grandchildren.

Month 12: Congress passed another bill.

Month 13: This thing will never go away. Ever. AAAAH. Help me! AAAAHHHH!

Month 14: Tattoo still disappearing. Sorry for outburst.

Conclusion

Having been several times through Sylvester McBean's star-off machine, I've come to an impasse. I can't seem to move forward, and there is no turning back. When they say tattoos are permanent, they are talking not only about the stain on your skin but the one left behind on your identity.

Dr. Kaufman has given me the best service that money -- gobs of money -- can buy, yet part of me wants the tattoo. It may be the same part that prides itself on how loudly it can burp, and that's why I'm not moving.

Worst case: I stick with the half-eaten band on my arm and tell people it came off naturally.

Best case: I forge ahead until you can't identify what was on my arm, but if you squint your eyes and tilt your face, you can faintly make out the words, "I'm an idiot."