

**Dr. Antony  
looked straight  
into my eyes.  
“Son”, he said  
sternly, “If I  
don’t fix this,  
no girl will ever  
marry you.”**

It was there that I met Dr. Antony. I had heard about him. He was the only doctor in the village, and everyone swore he was the best in the world. After a cursory look at my finger he proceeded to stitch the separated skin and nail back to the raw finger surface. I wonder whether he had skipped the chapter on local anesthetics because he made no attempt to numb me before this little operation. With the first stitch I screamed out in excruciating pain. Dr. Antony looked straight into my eyes. “Son”, he said sternly, “If I don’t fix this, no girl will ever marry you.” I looked at my newly married Uncle Damu. He nodded his head silently.

Strange are the workings of a ten year old’s mind. Until that day I could have sworn that the last thing on my mind was romance. Yet the doctor’s grave warning seemed to strike at my heart like a cold knife. I bit my lip and blinked through my tears as he put two more sutures in. Then, with my finger all wrapped up I went back home to my grandmother.

The skin and nail would eventually slough away and were replaced by new skin and a somewhat oddly shaped new fingernail. Dr. Antony’s handiwork wasn’t too bad considering he was no plastic surgeon but his words always haunted me. My middle finger did look like an ugly sibling of the rest of my digits. I wondered whether it would escape the notice of the fairer sex. Throughout my adolescence I couldn’t resist putting my hand into my pocket every time I saw a pretty girl .....

Years passed. The day I got married I decided to come clean with my wife. “There is something I have to tell you” I said in almost a whisper. I could feel her eyes burning a hole through my head. I shoved my finger in her face. “See, it’s crooked!”



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I had played this scene over and over in my mind numerous times. It usually ended with the heroine rushing out of the room with a horrified scream or a stifled sob. But I wasn’t prepared for what happened next. If she was shocked by the monstrosity, she hid it well. “Here, put some Amrutanjan on it” she said, as she fished out a tiny bottle from her handbag.

That night as the heat from the Amrutanjan soothed my finger it also soothed the depths of my soul like I had never experienced before. It was like the rain was gone and it was going to be a bright sunny day. Who was this woman? Clearly she had no use for my medical degree. In all but an instant she had come up with an (albeit ridiculous) remedy for my crooked finger. Later I would come to know that she used the Amrutanjan balm as a universal panacea for everything from headaches, colds, heart attacks and generalized stupidity of the male. She carried it wherever she went which explained why she had it with her on our wedding night .....

During the many years of our married life we have had our fair share of arguments, and though I have never won, I can always end it on a triumphant note by giving her the middle finger. It’s my way of saying “There, you knew what you were getting, didn’t you?”

It never fails to shut her up.

**Palangat Radhakrishnan is a medical graduate from Madras Medical College. He did postgraduate studies in Calicut Medical College.**

**Currently he is a practicing anesthesiologist at New York Presbyterian Brooklyn Methodist Hospital**