

Treatment: **SUICIDE MEDICINE**  
Allison V. Fine

Removed from her familiar surroundings in urban Chicago, Aresta, aged 15, overwhelmed with anger and confusion concerning her mother's death in a car crash, is shipped off to Montana to live with her grandfather.

Michael Brenner, a 70-something rancher, now running an ice cream shop in Colombia Falls, Montana, is a man conflicted with unresolved issues. His wife's suicide many years before and his daughter's death prove too much. When Aresta arrives, he finds difficulty coping with the responsibility of taking a rebellious teenager into his life.

Aresta arrives into Michael's home and quickly senses how to push his buttons. Unexpressed grief overtakes them both, but soon erupts into bantering and conflict as Aresta attempts to push the limits and find out what has made Michael taciturn and closed.

Aresta meets a young man, Delbert Ketterling, at the local high school. Delbert is abused by his father. Out of anger he has come up with an elaborate scheme for a mutual suicide pact, but tells Aresta it's just a long sleep to get the attention of the adults. Aresta resists at first, but changes her mind after a series of conflicts with Michael.

Michael, in an attempt to resolve past issues and present problems, brings Aresta with him to the reservation nearby. There, Michael's demons come to life. He faces certain family members who hold a grudge from the past. In order to alleviate his feelings of guilt, he rebuilds his self-esteem by rebuilding homes for the Native elders. In this way he keeps the family connections alive, and his own system of self worth intact.

At the reservation, Aresta meets Rebecca, who becomes a kind of mentor/elder to the troubled teen, helping her face her mixed heritage. While spending an afternoon with Rebecca, Aresta sees Marla, a mysterious ghost-like figure from Michael's past.

Aresta and Delbert sneak off one evening to consummate their suicide pact. Michael finds the youngsters in the barn, where his wife hung herself many years before. Aresta just barely makes it, but Delbert dies.

The death of Delbert and the near death of Aresta, is a wake up call for everyone. Michael is compelled to resolve his conflicts with the past and make peace with his demons. At the same time, he must also bridge the gap between himself and his granddaughter. This is done when Michael finally reaches back into the past, meeting with his past lover Marla, who destroyed his marriage and caused Michael's wife to hang herself. Marla is also his niece.

"Uncles keep the family intact," Rebecca states. The position of Uncle is sacred in Native American culture and Michael transgressed this sacred trust. In addition, Marla had a child who was the victim of fetal alcohol syndrome. The child is now a grown man mentally disabled. This haunts Michael. Although he cannot force Marla to forgive him, he must forgive himself, make peace with the past and move on with his life. Michael confronts Marla in the local bar. Their son stabs him in a sudden moment of rage. In this way Michael feels he has somehow "paid" for his sins and feels redeemed.

Ending with Rebecca, Michael and Aresta walking out into a sweeping wheat field, "Suicide Medicine" allows Michael and Aresta to achieve an uneasy reconciliation. It is spring, a time of new beginnings. As they gaze into the sun-drenched wheat field surrounded with Montana's big sky, all three feel a close, sacred bond with each other. Rebecca states in the final speech that the land is the real hero.

Michael looks back a moment at the beautiful young wife of his caretaker. Freeze frame on this moment, leaving the audience to wonder: will Michael have another inappropriate relationship even after all that has happened?

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