

# Keeping On

Category: Pretending

written by Lisa Salamon-Handel | October 9, 2018

Upon entering an exam room, a doctor surely hopes to be greeted with a warm “How are you today?” and an exchange of pleasantries before getting into the purpose of the visit. But what if a diagnosis has been made and major surgery has been advised? In such cases, honest patient responses are of course an option, and doctors have, again surely, heard them all. But I’ve never met my surgeon, so I feel uncomfortable being emotionally forthcoming from the outset. My anxiety, my fears for the future, my lack of control over my circumstances might overwhelm the room.

Thus I am empathetic as my surgeon enters the room—after all, she’s coming in “blind.” She smiles, I stifle my tears and offer an upbeat “Hello.” Then I recognize the elephant in the room: “We are okay,” I say, “though, you know, not here because we want to be.” Relief floods me as she nods in recognition at me and my husband. I consider asking, “Can I just take a peek in that file and see my breast MRI report?” I’m a master-Google MD, after all. But I refrain. Instead, we wait, holding it together.

She remarks kindly, “You are going to be just fine,” then continues, “You are the poster child—why we begin these annual tests at 40.” Once she removes the Stage 0 high-grade cells from my chest, she explains, her recommended plastic surgeon will “perfect” the region. The results will make me look younger, she says. My upper body will lack evidence of three pregnancies and years of gravity. I’ll resume a perkiness I didn’t know I’d wanted. They’ll have me in a bikini by July, she says, waving goodbye to “all this.” I choose to believe her.

I know I’m in the best hands, as my surgeon’s reputation precedes her. My husband agrees but is surprised I’m comfortable with the surgery and reconstruction. Comfortable is not the word I’d use for “all this.” Resigned to my fate, perhaps? Courageous? Maybe, a bit, but this feels like a no-win, so my comfort level barely registers. The only way out is through. Running away could be worse, something I’m not willing to risk.

Once dressed again and out of my pink gown, I shake hands with my competent, charismatic, confident surgeon. Game on. Trust the process. Fake it until I make it. Fingers crossed I’ll find myself swimming in that suit by midsummer.

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