

The Third Wheel

Category: Not Knowing

written by Nan Mutnick | January 17, 2020

I am trying to move the language from forever to this moment, in the airport departure lounge. To loosen up on declaring “You’re always” and “You’re never” and instead say “Right now you are ...”

I might think I know what’s coming, but I have no idea exactly what it will look like and when it might happen. For now, the “what ifs” are not dormant, but also not dominant. Regardless, an illness becomes an uninvited third person in a two-person marriage.

An illness lurks and skulks in the corners, casting a shadow on even on the sunniest days, like this one.

I don’t know what the future will look like. I’m mad as hell that I have to think about it. If I don’t think about it, can I pretend it’s not there?

I try to be tolerant, compassionate, understanding and nice. He does not. He is the sick one. I am not.

I am married to a man and his autoimmune diseases. Yes, he has more than one. He’s man of plenty—plenty of complaints and ailments and now the beginnings of limitations. I notice the wobble as he finds his legs, the slightly altered gait as we walk toward the departure gate for our flight. Does he or does he choose not to? Dare I ask ...

“This is mine to deal with, not yours,” he says.

He could not be more wrong. But he is never wrong. I am the intruder when it comes to our third wheel.

“Don’t stare,” he says, as we wait for our group to be called.

“I’m not,” I respond.

Indeed, I am not staring. I am wondering: How does that woman push and fold the wheelchair she stands behind? She is not much bigger than me. I’m trying to imagine what the man sitting in the chair thinks, how he feels about being pushed around.

But for now, we are standing on line to board a plane to Paris.

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