

Beyond Connection

Category: Connections

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | December 21, 2022

Very early on a Sunday morning, my friend Marla called asking for help. She was in excruciating pain—bone metastases, as it later became clear, from her breast cancer. She'd been instructed to head to the emergency room and needed a ride.

I rushed to her house and, as gently as I could, eased her out her front door and into my car. The hospital was less than a mile away, but the ride seemed to take ages. It was March, prime pothole season in the Northeast, so I drove slowly, hyper-cautiously, over the ragged roads, trying to minimize the bumps that left her wincing.

At her house, throughout the drive, and while waiting to be seen at the hospital, Marla kept talking about “the doctor,” chattering on and on as if silence would leave too much room for her pain and the fears that crept along in its wake. *I've spoken to the doctor. The doctor called ahead so the hospital knows I'm coming. The doctor will meet me at the hospital.* The doctor this, the doctor that.

Eventually, I said to her, a little puzzled, “You mean Michael?” I knew Michael, a local oncologist, only slightly, but he and his wife went way back with Marla, and he had treated her cancer.

Yes, Marla confirmed, she was talking about Michael. And then she went right back to referring to him as “the doctor.” *I wonder what's taking the doctor so long. I thought the doctor would be here by now.*

I realized that in that moment, when the slightest movement, even a deep breath, made her flinch in pain, old friends like Michael might be nice to have, but are utterly extraneous. A nearby friend who can drive you to the hospital is useful. But only The Doctor could deliver the specific mojo that Marla craved with a hunger deeper than her raw and immediate need for pain relief. Hope and trust and authority, the power to make her cancer go away, or at least wait in the wings for a while longer: for those you need something more magical, and more majestic, than someone you've been on first-name terms with for years.

No matter how long a connection she had with a guy named Michael, the only person who really mattered to Marla on that Sunday morning was The Doctor.

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