

Wishing I Were Still Waiting

Category: Watching the Clock

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | October 2, 2022

The fountain, meant to evoke a spa-like environment in the waiting room, tinkled loudly enough to be distracting. Still, I persevered with my reading, the downtime a welcome postwork/precommute break while I waited for my annual gynecologist appointment. As an extra treat, I had plans to meet my brother afterward for coffee.

Pausing between chapters, I realized I had been trying to tune out the fountain for well over an hour, with no sign I'd be ushered inside anytime soon. My brother and I had left our meeting time flexible, acknowledging the elasticity of appointment schedules. But this had gone well beyond the "give or take thirty minutes" zone, so I checked in with him.

My ordinarily mild-mannered brother was angry, not with me or the hiccup in our plans, but at my doctor, and doctors in general. "That's outrageous!" he fumed. "Patients should bill doctors for the time we waste waiting to see them. Just leave. Leave and find a new doctor."

"Look, the wait is annoying, and longer than usual, but I like this guy," I told him.

"A guy with zero respect for patients? That's idiotic."

"No, he *does* respect patients. Schedules, not so much. When you're in with him, you have his full attention and all the time in the world. That's the tradeoff. I'd much rather wait to see him than be rushed through a conveyor-belt appointment."

With a skeptical grunt, my brother agreed to reschedule. I resumed reading and waiting.

Another kind of waiting: Busyness, procrastination, and then COVID meant I skipped several years' worth of visits. Finally, I made an appointment for a Monday afternoon. Thursday evening, my phone vibrated with a reminder: Text Y to confirm your appointment, N to reschedule. I hit Y and went back to my dinner.

So I was a little annoyed when I saw the office number reappear on my phone the next morning. Why another reminder? I had said I would be there.

"I'm sorry, we have to reschedule," the receptionist told me. "Unfortunately, the doctor passed."

Passed? I thought. *Passed what? A kidney stone?*

Ohhh, that kind of passed.

"Are you telling me he died?" My sharp tone reflected an initial burst of

anger. *I* committed to keeping the appointment. The doctor, though, wasn't holding up his end of the deal.

My response was childish—he wasn't exactly bailing because he got a more enticing invitation—but anger and shock blocked clear thinking. As those feelings ebbed, sadness flowed behind them, as I mourned the loss of a doctor whose care made hour-long waits worthwhile, annoying fountain and all.

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