

In the Next Exam Room: Episode Eleven

Vanessa: Endometriosis is when the tissue that makes up the uterine lining starts showing up on other organs inside of your body. Most likely, one in ten women have Endometriosis and many of those women are asymptomatic or have bad periods, but can otherwise go about their lives.

In my case, the uterine lining attached to my hips, to my ovaries, and completely encased my colon. Between those two presentations of the disease, I was in pain whenever I walked and vomited daily because food couldn't get processed out of my stomach so it would just shoot back up. This went on for almost a year. Why a whole year? Because that is how long it took me to get diagnosed.

Hilary Mantel, the Booker award winning novelist, also has Endometriosis. And hers went undiagnosed for so long that it wrapped around her wind-pipe, and permanently damaged her voice. When she went to the doctor in the 1970's, and told him of daily vomiting, the doctor sent her... to a psychiatrist. In 2018, when I went to my GP to tell her about my daily vomiting, she recommended a sleep study and a visit to... you guessed it, a psychiatrist.

(MUSIC OUT)

The medical establishment does not take women's pain seriously. We know this. The dollar amount differential spent researching Erectile Dysfunction vs Endometriosis is not worth remarking upon. Let's leave it at: if men had endometriosis, they'd not be sent to the psychiatrist for it. There might even be a little blue pill.

There was one person as I went through this ordeal who understood everything about it. She's my friend and one of the loves of my life: Brigid. Brigid is our writer this week and she is writing a Friends to Lovers Romance novel. I'm Vanessa Zoltan, and this is Hot and Bothered.

(MUSIC)

Brigid: So I have Endometriosis.

Vanessa: Me too!

Brigid: I know! *laughs* I'm sorry that I just smiled because of that, but it's nice to not be alone. Um, I was diagnosed almost ten years ago, and, like, have been living a pretty okay life with it, and then this past May, so it's almost October now, so it's been however many months that is, it's gotten really bad.

I don't know if a medical term is flare up, like I'm not sure if Endometriosis can flare up, but it's, um, taken over my life since this past May and, um, the pain is exhausting and, like, really challenging. Like, it's, apparently the flare up has been happening since before May but I've been complaining to doctors who, like, don't know a lot about Endometriosis, about these symptoms that really don't seem super related and so, like, I've spent more than a year feeling kind of crazy and kind of weak and kind of like a hypochondriac who's, like, worrying about all these little things that don't seem to be connected. And all of the tests are coming back normal and in May, when things were getting really bad and they were pushing me to see a specialist, and then having him be like all of this is related is relieving, but it doesn't take away the trauma of being told that, like, nothing's wrong with you.

Vanessa: Brigid's Endometriosis was the worst it had ever been right around the time she agreed to start recording *Hot and Bothered* and start writing a romance novel. Her two main characters were two best friends who fall in love, Tomas and Cara.

Brigid: So Tomas and Cara. They are, they were friends in childhood, they grew up in the same place - I don't know where, there's no way this book is going to not be about me, mhm you know, like I just don't know how that's possible-

Vanessa: Mhm.

Brigid: It's my first try, like, of course. So, they are maybe going to be from Oklahoma.
Um. *laughs*

Vanessa: One of my best friends is from Oklahoma, I hear it's a good place to be from.

Brigid: Yeah I hear it's alright. So they might be from Oklahoma or somewhere in the Midwest. I have no idea what I want Tomas to be like. Uh, Tyler, my boyfriend, last night asked me, 'How much is this going to be about our relationship?' I was like, 'I really have no idea.' I'm not setting out for it to be about our relationship, but, like, I don't know how boys- I don't know how my partners think, I've always ended up with very not

chatty, not verbose, not like overly gushy people, like, I don't know what it's like to be with people like that, so, but I want, like, Tomas to be a communicator, but I want to honor quiet men. *laughs*

Vanessa: Why do you want Tomas to be a communicator if that's not the kind of guy that you're attracted to?

Brigid: It's just, there's something really nice and dreamy and lovely about having someone tell you to your face what they're thinking and feeling. This is fantasy, you know, like, that's me, I'm an over communicator, I'm an over sharer, I deeply believe in telling people what I'm thinking and feeling, like how else are they gonna know? I'm just a teller, and I like that about myself. It doesn't mean that I wish my partner was different, like, I respect the fact that he communicates in different ways, and, like, it's been a fun challenge and thing that we work on together to know who, like what are you thinking, like, and to learn other ways of knowing that. But at the end of the day, like, my fantasy is just that, like, everyone around me tells me what they're thinking and feeling all the time. So, like, why not write it? Or in the world where that's real.

Vanessa: So you tell Tyler, 'no it's not based on you, it's based on you if I could change you.'

Brigid: *laughs* Exactly.

Vanessa: Right? There's a discipline when you're in a relationship to, like, not want to change the person that you're with, or to at least to not try to change the person you're with, and so, right, creative writing, you get to change the person you're with.

Brigid: Yeah, I get to imagine a world where everyone thinks it's appropriate to overshare. I'm here for that.

Vanessa: I love that your idea of, like, fantasy doesn't have dragons.

Brigid: No it doesn't.

Vanessa: Like everybody is, like, a very emotive person.

Brigid: Yeah, it's what I want.

Vanessa: Brigid has a deep commitment to communicating. So of course she loves friends to lovers as a trope. It's an all-in-one-knower. It's the 2-in-1 shampoo/conditioner of romantic relationships. Someone who knows you as a friend *and* as a lover? What could be better?

On some level, Brigid believes that if she shares everything, and everyone shares everything with her- there would be no problems. And I think that feeling was doubled for both she and I during the time of our sickness. That desire to be deeply known. Endometriosis made us such a *mystery*. So of course she wanted to live in a world in which someone knew her inside and out.

For the year that I was at my sickest, I felt completely unknowable on a physical level, but on a level more than that too. I genuinely felt like I didn't know myself anymore. I am someone who keeps my promises. But for that year, and for the months of recovery after surgery, I didn't know how to be myself; someone who shows up for friends, who makes the dinner, who gets the work done... I would make plans, and then throw up and have to go back to bed. I became someone different from the person who I'd always prided myself on being. And even now... being sick changed my body, it changed my habits. I'm a different person than I was before I got sick.

I really like what Brigid is saying about knowability and love... of course you have to know somebody in order to really love them. And loving somebody allows you to know them better. But part of me balks at this idea. Having come off of a year of not being able to know myself, I would hate to be unlovable when I'm unknowable. Sometimes we are mysteries to ourselves, let alone to one another. And Brigid and her partner, Tyler, rub up against this tension in their relationship too. Brigid thinks she *really* knows Tyler, and he *really* knows her. Tyler thinks that there's a part of himself that will always be unknowable to Brigid.

Brigid: Regardless of what Tyler says, I believe that I know me, and I know him, and I see why it works. And, like, I do my best to make him feel seen, and like it's his prerogative to say, 'no, no there are things you don't know about me, there are things you couldn't possibly understand,' like, of course, that's probably true, but at the end of the day like I do, I do, I think that I trust me to know him, and honestly I think that I trust my perception of him more than I trust his perception of him sometimes. And I'm in a place where I trust his perception of me more than I trust my perception of me sometimes, and that just feels like love.

I try very hard to respect when Tyler says 'you don't know me,' or when he looks at our cat and says, 'Tuck is the only person who really understands me.' *laughs* He believes that wholeheartedly, and I'm over here being like 'mhm, excuse me?' I need to honor him feeling that way, but I also just, like, think it's, I think he's full of shit. I just don't think that's true. I don't know, I really believe that, like, I see you.

Vanessa: Far be it for me to ever disagree with Brigid Mave Goggin, but I do a little bit side with Tyler on this one. I want to feel like I know me better than my partner, Peter, does. One day, shortly after my grandfather died, Peter and I were on a hike. He mentioned, quite casually, that I was *clearly* in a depression. I snapped at him immediately. I was NOT in a depression. I was sad. I was grieving for my grandfather and sad for my mom. But I was *not* in a depression. He said, "OK" and dropped it.

A few days later I told him in all caps: I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU. I'm in a depression.

He said, "Okay. But what do you have to tell me?"

And I said: "That you were right. I am depressed."

He said: "Oh. I know."

I was livid. Sure... he was right all along. But when I told him that I wasn't in a depression, I wanted him to believe me! I wanted him to take me at my word, even though I was wrong.

Sure- Brigid is TECHNICALLY right. Peter did know me better than I did. But I think that PETER SHOULD HAVE DONE A BETTER JOB AT PRETENDING THAT I KNEW ME BETTER! If he really knew me he would know that was exactly the moment to patronize me!

But now I'm worried... do I think that we have to be totally honest with each other in order to love each other? Or do I think that sometimes, in order to love someone, we maybe have to lie to them?

For those few months, post diagnosis, waiting for surgery, I stopped talking to Peter about my symptoms. I did this for a lot of reasons. I was tired of hearing myself complain. I didn't want him to see me as sick. I didn't feel like he would understand and although he believed me, I was honestly scared that he would stop believing me. We had a word for what I had, but how could I tell him that sometimes lying down hurt my hips so much that I didn't want to sleep over anymore, because I often just cried myself to sleep? How could I tell him that without him seeing me in a way I didn't want him to

see me? He was my partner, not my friend. And that meant that I wanted him to see me in a certain way. Which has to be part of what a friends to lovers trope is about-- there's a difference between a friend and a lover.

Brigid: I don't like having to, like, perform my pain, and yet it feels really disingenuous when I'm in the world and people don't know that I'm in pain. So it's always walking this balance of how much do I want the people around me to know, how much do I need the people around me to know in order to function at a much lower level than I wish I was, and yet still functioning. You know, like, like I could perform my pain and I could take way more sick days than I am, and, like, I could do that, but that would be giving up so much, um, but I don't want to give up the validity of being sick.

Vanessa: It's hard for me, like somebody will ask how I am, I'm like, 'I don't feel like complaining right now.'

Brigid: Yeah, it's exhausting. *laughs*

Vanessa: So I'm like, 'I'm just going to lie to you.' Then three days later I'll be like, 'well I've been in pain for the last week', and they're like, 'but you said you were fine' and I'm like 'well I'm not fine.' It's just...

Brigid: Yeah. My partner and I are-have been struggling, like, it's hard to be sick. And he's been sick too, like he's dealing with his own stuff and apparently our bodies are falling apart *laughs* that's just what happens. And there are parts of me that feel a little unseen by Tyler, but I also know, now that we're both more informed, like, he's not disregarding what's happening, um, and he has been incredibly understanding and supportive, but he's also a little afraid of my body. I think, like, we're both a little unsure of what it can handle, we're both a little unsure of the challenges. You know, we went to New York City, um, and I was in so much pain that, like, I had to lay down on a sidewalk in Brooklyn, like, and someone had to go get the car and take us home and, like, he told me "I don't ever want to feel that helpless again." Which is a very valid thing to say. And so he's like, 'you need to be more vocal about your pain so that we don't get to that place.' And I heard that, and I'm trying to do that but it's hard because I want him to see more than my pain, I wanted him to see through it and, I mean, that's hard. You know?

Vanessa: Yeah, I sometimes think about that also, like, there are things that I haven't told Peter, and I'm like, do I ever want to tell you? Or, like, is it sad if I know there are things I will never tell you? Or is it, like, empowering to know that there are certain secrets I'll take with me?

Brigid: I do think it's a little empowering to say I can create a boundary here and it doesn't invalidate the intimacy that we have.

Vanessa: It just means- that's mine. We also, like, don't share underwear.

Brigid: Right, right. *laughs*

Vanessa: We recognize that each others underwear, we fold each others underwear, but you don't need to put it on, like, we don't need to know everything about each other.

Brigid: That's such a good metaphor, I'm going to take that home with me, I'm going to put it in my pocket.

Vanessa: I feel like it's maybe the wisest thing I've ever said. Yep, I just did a mental calculation, it's the wisest thing I've ever said.

Brigid: Yeah.

Vanessa: I know I sound like I have it all figured out, what with my brilliant underwear metaphor, but actually, it was gnawing at me. Like I said, I like Brigid's idea of knowability. And of course part of me knows that it's okay to lie to Peter sometimes... but is it actually okay for me to keep *lying* to my *partner*? Am I keeping him from knowing me?

[AD BREAK]

Vanessa: In episode three I went to my friend, who happens to be a priest studying forgiveness, Matt Potts, and I asked him to condemn someone who had lied to me. Now I went back to him and asked him to justify my lying to Peter. Doesn't it sound fun to be my friend?

Vanessa: Hi Matt.

Matt: Hi Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thank you for coming back into our studio.

Matt: It's my pleasure.

Vanessa: So, last time we had you in here I was telling you about this man who lied to me, and what I could do about that. Right, what role forgiveness was going to play in that.

Matt: If any, sure, yeah.

Vanessa: And now I have you in here to talk about lies that I have told.

Matt: Okay.

Vanessa: And to get you to forgive me.

Matt: Lies you've told to me?

Vanessa: Including to you, yeah.

Matt: Okay, yeah.

Vanessa: Yeah. So as you, you now know, I was sick for a long time. And I remember cancelling on you and your family a few times, like I was supposed to come visit-

Matt: Yes.

Vanessa: And I'd be like 'oh I can't.'

Matt: I didn't know that's why you cancelled. Really?

Vanessa: There you go, I did.

Matt: Okay.

Vanessa: Yeah, I lied to a lot of people because I was, a, a lot of my symptoms are embarrassing, like it's gross to talk about vomiting and there were grosser things and then also, like, I was tired of complaining

Matt: Yeah, I guess I'm not sure I would define it as a lie. I mean like, technically, like, there are lies of omission, but I don't know like I guess I wouldn't define that as a lie.

Vanessa: But I, like, didn't tell Peter, my partner. And I still don't like to tell him when I'm having bad days.

Matt: Okay, but Peter knew that you were sick, he just didn't know on a particular day that you couldn't deal.

Vanessa: Correct, Peter knew that I was sick. There was one day in particular where he was hosting a dinner party, I was on my way there, I threw up all over myself while driving there so I texted him and was like, 'one of my students is having an emergency, I can't come.' And he's like, 'I thought you were already on your way' and I was like, 'I just got a call!' like I made up an emergency. Mostly, I like, the other people were already there and I didn't want him to say to them, 'Vanessa's just thrown up all over herself' and then I didn't want to be a topic of conversation, like 'Vanessa's sick and we don't know what's wrong with her,' and like, it was entirely selfish that I withheld this from him, and lied to him. I would get into bed and then text my friend Brigid or Ariana and like tell them the whole truth, right, be like, 'not only am I sick but, like, I just lied to Peter and that makes me feel so sad' and so I'm wondering what the line is on, like, why sometimes it feels like I can be more honest with my friends than my partner, and is that actually a kind of love, or is that a bad thing that I feel like I can't always be honest with him.

Matt: I don't know, I, there maybe, the reason I want to move away from language of lying is because I think you are affixing maybe more guilt to this, these acts, than you need to, maybe. The way to recontextualize it is not, 'why do I lie to this man I love' but-

Vanessa: And who loves me and makes me feel safe.

Matt: Yes, right, but 'how do I communicate my needs better when I have them,' right. Because what I hear you saying in that moment is what I need is to get into bed and not have to take care of anybody else right now. Even my partner who loves me so much that if he reaches out to me to want to care for me, I feel like I need to respond lovingly, right, like what's needed is not, like, to decide when to lie and when not to lie. What's needed is just sort of a conversation with this person, maybe not in the moment of crisis, which is, like, sometimes I just need to crawl into bed and hurt. Especially

when he's in the middle of a dinner party where, like, that lie doesn't seem particularly selfish, although you called it selfish, because he's throwing a dinner party, it's important to him. You want him not to worry about you, it sounds like you're taking too much of the blame for that, that misrepresentation, when what you're trying to do is actually minimize stress for everybody. And also in a time in which, like, you also knew what you most needed in that moment, which was to get into bed and just and not see people and take care of yourself.

Vanessa: But what I could do is then text Ariana and Brigid and be like, 'I'm scared I'm never going to live my life again, I've become a flake,' right, all the truth and all the feelings, and that did not feel like a selfish thing to do to them, but it felt like if I was telling Peter all those fears, then it would have been selfish. And we think of our partners as someone who we should totally be honest with, and yet it would have felt so bad to me to, like, put all that fear on him. The realization that I had that maybe my life was changed forever, I had on the phone with my mom, and like super not with Peter *laughs* and yeah like, does that mean that I'm in a bad relationship, cause I don't think it does.

Matt: I don't think it does either. I mean, to me, this makes sense. I mean, of course the person you care about so deeply is the one you want to take care of also. I mean, your relationship with your mother in a kinda' ideal paternal or parental relationship, the parent is the caregiver, you love your parent back, but like the dynamic as it's supposed to be set out, I mean normalizing it or whatever, but in general you think about the parent being the caregiver and so you don't feel guilt just being completely cared for and being a burden to your *laughs* to you mother. 'Cause that's the deal and she knows it and you know it, it's fine, right. But Peter, you don't wanna, you love him you don't want him to be burdened.

Vanessa: So I guess the other thing about this is, like, I guess part of me is just sad there's a huge part of me that I don't want him to know.

Matt: I mean, what does it mean to know somebody, right? I mean really, like, I think from like, from Buddhism and other philosophies of the self, there's a sense that your self is actually a different self when you're with other people, right, I mean the kind of person that you are and how you understand yourself actually changes depending upon the relationship that you're in. That doesn't mean that one person knows you and the other doesn't know you. It actually means more, that, that all of our identities are built up by these complicated matrices of relationships and that other people's

relationships to us form who we are and how we are and that one one way of being or one way of being known isn't necessarily the best way of being known.

It's also the reason why, like, there's this line from scripture, I've been, I'm doing a wedding in like a couple of weeks and they actually picked a line from scripture that I don't care for very much so I'm trying to figure out how to preach it, and it's from The Song of Solomon and it says "my beloved is mine." I worry about that because it sounds so possessive. I'm, like, really I don't know if I like how that can be interpreted. But the way I think I'm gonna preach about it is that there are certain people who we do give ourselves to, and they give us back to ourselves in the version that we most admire or want to be, right?

The reason we might fall in love with one person is because the way that person knows us, we see a self that we can both recognize but also believe in and admire and cherish and feel cherished and all those things, right, and the person who knows the deepest, darkest, or maybe most, um, gross secret about my past is the one who knows me best. Actually the one who knows me the way I most cherish being known is the one who knows me best. And that may not include all the gory details.

Vanessa: Yeah, I now *laughs* I don't know how to say this without being like, 'yeah I guess I don't love Brigid and Ariana that much,' but part of it is that I felt comfortable telling them because I knew that they would come to me if I told them 'I need you' but also they wouldn't let it ruin their nights. That they loved me exactly the right amount. That I could, like, throw up a flag and be like, 'I need you to come over because I can't walk the dog and she needs to be walked' but not so much that if they had a really important evening they wouldn't, they like wouldn't cancel their plans for me. Whereas Peter would have dropped everything, including the dinner with all of his friends. So, I, yeah, I wonder if actually it's somehow strategically easier to be known by people who you-

Matt: I mean, there's a reason why doctors don't operate on their family members, right or therapists don't right. I've also been a pastor to people who were dying, right, who did not know how to tell their family 'it's time to stop treatment.' Because those people didn't want to hurt their family, right. But they could tell me, right, precisely because I do not have that kind of intimacy. That doesn't mean I know them better, right, I would never believe that I, that person therefore loves me more and knows me better. It just means that they're caring for the people they care about too. It's just negotiating the complexity of being a self who is constituted by relationship in multiple different ways. And I think this is why, like, the language of lies seem to be

clouding what was actually going on in this situation which is just people figuring out how to care for each other in the best ways they could, right. Including you trying to care for for your partner. Yeah, so.

Vanessa: You keep saying that you don't want me to keep calling these lies. What makes these not lies, I did literally lie...

Matt: To be clear I think you lied.

Vanessa: Okay, phew.

Matt: But I also think that sort of, emotionally and morally, whether or not you lied is a lot less interesting than the kind of dynamics of care and knowing and love that were going on there. And just to make it a question of 'did I lie or not' or 'is it okay to lie sometimes' really oversimplifies what was actually this really complicated matrix of feelings and compassion and selfhood and all that stuff.

Vanessa: Brigid and I each went to have our surgeries a few weeks apart from each other. She visited me when I was post op. I visited her when she was post-op. Both of our moms came to take care of us while we were convalescing so that our boyfriends only had to miss a day or two of work. We started to get better.

A lot of people were wonderful to me while I was sick; and trust me. I wasn't easy. I would have an OK day, agree to do something, and then flake. I once walked to the studio, just to throw up, faint, and have to go home. This podcast that you are listening to right now took *months* longer to make than it should have. I cancelled live events, trips, didn't walk my dog as much. But no matter how terrible I felt, there was always one person who I could turn to, and that was Brigid.

And of course it's in part because we were already really close friends. But it was also just circumstance. She and I were on such parallel paths for those few months, that I once texted her when I was at our mutual Endometriosis doctor and it turned out that she was in the next exam room. If love were only predicated on knowing, then for those months, there was no one in the world who was more capable of loving me than Brigid.

As we recovered, we got back into the studio. Brigid was having a tough time with figuring out what the tension would be between Cara and Tomas; there has to be a conflict in a good Romance novel and Brigid couldn't quite figure out what was keeping

the two of them apart. But she had written a new 'friend' into her story for her main character Cara.

Brigid: I think I talked before, but I'm finding it way easier to write these little vignettes. Like I have these scenes. And so I feel like I'm really getting to know particularly the three, well, like, two main characters, Cara and Tomas, and also Cara's best friend Laura. I feel like I'm getting to know them really well, because those are the scenes I've written and I think about them a lot. Like, the vignette that I imagine starting the story is Laura and Cara moving Cara's mattress out of her room into Laura's room, because Cara had bought that mattress with her ex boyfriend, cause they thought they were gonna be together long enough to need that mattress. Um, and so she's like "I don't want this anymore" and Laura's like "I will absolutely take a free mattress" and so they're like, moving it into her room. I just love thinking about them moving furniture together. *laughs* So like, I think about it all the time laughs. I wrote the scene, I don't think I need to do anything else to the scene, but I think about it all the time.

Vanessa: Brigid had written this character of Laura into her story, which was so interesting because I now had this theory of friends and lovers - that sometimes you can be more honest with your friends than you can with your partner.

Brigid: Like what I was trying, what I almost said earlier and hesitated, is that I do think that there is something that allows Cara and Laura to be more selfish in their relationship with each other than Cara and Tomas. Meaning that like: Cara can prioritize herself *more* in her relationship with Laura than she can with Tomas, and I hesitated to say that because there's just something that feels like maybe that's a weird thing to admit, but I do think it's true. And when I think about my relationship with Tyler, like I do think that I'm not allowed to be as selfish with him. Allowed, who's making me, that's a weird word to use, but, like, I don't want to be as selfish in my relationship with Tyler because it wouldn't be as successful. But, like, I feel pretty okay being selfish with you, because I know, one, that you understand my selfishness more than Tyler could, and I don't know why, but like I just know that you could and, um, it also wouldn't put us at stake, when sometimes my selfishness could put Tyler and I at stake.

Vanessa: Right. I once, I was with Peter and he was at a work event and he got a text that I saw that was, like, very shocking and disturbing and I knew I could not, like, *he* was in the middle of a work event so I had to be very well behaved and like, not rattle him at his work event, and so I simultaneously texted you and Ariana, and were getting like both of your feedback, but like it allowed me to be a good partner and for it to have, like, a quick and, like, completely satisfying resolution with him because I got to get all

of my immature thoughts out on the two of you. *laughs* And so in that moment, like, you and Ariana knew me better than Peter, right, like you guys knew all the meanest, most scared, most vulnerable thoughts that I was having, but he got sort of the best of me, right, like he got the mature, composed version of me.

Brigid: Do you think that that version is less you? Like, are there parts of you missing in that version?

Vanessa: What do you think?

Brigid: I don't know what I think. Because I do think the messy parts of me and the panicked parts of me and the, honestly the funny parts of me, Tyler doesn't think I'm very funny, I think I'm hilarious,

Vanessa: You're objectively hilarious-

Brigid: And I think other people in the world know that I'm hilarious, so there's something about the lover relationship between Tyler and I that I'm a little less funny in, and I don't know why. But I do feel *wholly* myself when I'm with Tyler, like I feel my most full version of Brigid, and yet I do think that there are things that he doesn't get about me as much as I wish he got about me. So I don't know how both of those things are true at the same time but I've never felt like as much myself as I do when I'm being in this relationship with Tyler. I feel I like the version of myself that I am, I feel like I'm becoming more who I want to be, but like why doesn't he think I'm funny?

Vanessa: So I mean, to get to your, like, plot problem, I wonder if Tomas can just get really hurt by the fact that she doesn't tell him everything anymore, and that, like, if something's wrong with her, and he says 'what's wrong,' she might not want to answer him, and she might want to actually like go on a walk with Laura first before she answers him, right. Like, I think that there is some sadness and grief specifically in the friends to lovers trope, because she used to be funny around him, and like, now she's less funny.

Brigid: Oh, that's so right. I think I was assuming that in a friends to lovers trope, it's like you get the best of both worlds. Right, you're friends, and then you become lovers, and now look you get your friend lover, like, isn't that amazing. But I think that you're exactly right, that it has to change, because it's not just the sex that changes it, like, everything about being changes it. And it's not like all these people walking around in the world whose partners think they're not as funny as their friends do, like weren't

friends at any point in their relationship together. So I think that you're exactly right, like. It would be hard for Tomas to see that their relationship changes a little bit. And I think it would be hard for Cara too, but harder for Tomas and I wonder if that's because Tomas has been so focused on Cara and their friendship, because he did, like, have some feelings, and being really good close friends with her was enough at one point so like they were very, very close. And then becoming lovers means he's going to lose a little bit of that. I don't know, and that makes me sad right now, but I'm living it and it's not making me sad.

Vanessa: It's not making her sad- which is great. But it's still sometimes really frustrating.

Brigid: Just recently we were having this discussion about something and I was like, 'you remember when you used to think all of my medical complaints were like, silly, or like didn't align, or like maybe blah blah?' I made this offhand comment. And he was like, 'I mean some of them were.' That's what he said. And I was like, 'hold on, what?' And he was like, 'I never thought that the pain you were feeling wasn't real. I just thought that like the fact that you don't like running, and you were making that into a health thing, was silly.' And I was like, 'those were related! Like I have Endometriosis, in my chest cavity, there's a huge pressure on my heart, it makes it race, and it's hard for me to do cardio,' like I went through all of this again, and it felt so crazy to me that he didn't know that, but, like, I also withhold some information from him. And so, like, I don't know why I was so surprised that he didn't fully understand, like, this whole circle I've come through with my health. Um, and then I reminded myself, 'Oh, I haven't talked day to day with him about what my heart feels like since the surgery, and I haven't talked with him day to day about what it feels like now that I'm not getting short of breath walking up the stairs. Like I haven't been sharing those little things.' Anyways, all of that to say I've come back to this point where we have a normal knowability about the workings of my body, and it occasionally surprises me. Um, and like but it's a nice place to be. And now we have the, there's some mystery between us again.

Vanessa: I love the idea of radical honesty. Brigid is right... in a perfect world we would all be able to tell each other everything. But the time I kept the most secrets around my Endometriosis was a deeply imperfect time. When I was undiagnosed. When I was unknowable to myself, I didn't want to tell anybody what was going on. It was embarrassing, gross, and scary.

And thank god I talked to someone about it. Because talking about it with Brigid, is how I got diagnosed. That's right. Brigid is the one who diagnosed me. A specialist (who Brigid recommended) then verified the diagnosis. But Brigid, straight up, diagnosed me.

We thought that friends to lovers was the most romantic trope - that a friend who was also a lover was the platonic ideal of a romantic partner. An all in one shampoo and conditioner! But it turns out that in order to deeply condition your hair, you can't simultaneously wash it. In order for someone to be your partner, they can no longer be your friend. So friends to lovers isn't only a trope about falling in love with your best friend, it's also a trope about saying goodbye to your friend in order to have a really great partner.

By sometimes not telling Peter about my being sick, he got to keep knowing other parts of me.

The best Romance novels know this and don't have their couples in complete seclusion. There are friends and family. It's an ecosystem of love. There isn't a two-in-one friend. Which is great. Because it means that all of the loves in our life are irreplaceable.

[AD BREAK]

Vanessa: And now for this week's assignment from Julia Quinn.

Vanessa: Hi, Julia!

Julia: Hi!

Vanessa: How are you today?

Julia: I'm good, how are you?

Vanessa: Good, thank you. I'm feeling like I need a little more drama in my life.

Julia: *laughs* I'm sorry, that's the first time anyone has ever said that to me.

Vanessa: Really? People don't feel like they get into ruts and need a little drama?

Julia: No, everybody wants less drama in their lives. Maybe more in their books, but less in their lives.

Vanessa: Okay, how about that. I feel like I need a little more drama in my books.

Julia: Okay, that's fair.

Vanessa: So what is a good assignment for people for writing their conflict between their characters?

Julia: First you have to just figure out what that conflict is, and this is something you may have done already because usually when people are starting to write a book that's one of the things that they think about first. They're, like, I know who the characters are and then this is going to happen and this is what the story is *about* and usually when somebody thinks that what the stories about, they're thinking of a conflict. So chances are you already know what that conflict might be, but you may not have thought about how it affects the characters. I think people need to do a little work outside the manuscript. I think you need to define your conflict. Take a sheet of paper, write down what is the conflict, now look at that conflict and say okay, is this internal, external, or both. And if you're really feeling ambitious maybe try to say, okay it's about about 60/40. Figure it out.

Okay now look at the internal portion of the conflict. Is it coming mostly from one character or is it coming from both? And again, if it is coming from both (and it probably should be to some degree, although it can be primarily one-sided) define that. How is that affecting them, where does it come from? If somebody has this deep-seated emotion or feeling or vow whatever, where does that come from? Is it from childhood, is it from a bad experience, is it just, you know, some weird character trait? Are they a psychopath? I don't know. As you do figure these things out, if you do figure out *why* there's conflict, it's going to help you build one that is more realistic and more emotional and will grab the reader more. And so actually I've been telling you how to define the conflict and not actually write it, but I think that once you do that it will help you to understand your characters better. And in any scene, whether it's your conflict scene, whether it's your sex scene, and I know you desperately want to get to that topic-

Vanessa: I do.

Julia: It's going to be a better scene and you will write it better if you know your characters better.

Vanessa: And, I, my favorite kind of fight scene is when they're both right. Where I get completely moved by one character and I'm like "oh good point" and the other one makes a counterpoint and I'm like "oh what are you going to say about that!" *laughs* I just love when I'm like yeah they both just have such reasonable points.

Julia: Well you know I'd like to think when I get into an argument I'm always right but the truth is no, usually we're both right. There are very few people with whom I argue that I am completely wrong.

Vanessa: *laughs* I bet you're never wrong. Okay, well, Julia thank you so much and next week is sex scenes so we're finally gonna to get there!

Julia: I know, I know.

Vanessa: But for now, thank you so much and that is your assignment everybody! Go and map out your conflict and then if you can write me a great fight scene and we will talk to you all in two weeks.

Julia: And remember, the first rule of fight scene is write it.

Vanessa: Before we go, we're going to talk to one more person who I do not tell everything to but who knows me pretty well.

Vanessa: Hi Mom!

Mom: Hi honey. How are you?

Vanessa: I'm okay, how are you?

Mom: I'm okay, thank you. What's up?

Vanessa: So *laughs* I am calling because in our family we have a policy that when any of us have any health concerns, we have to tell the whole family about them.

Mom: Right.

Vanessa: Why do we have that policy?

Mom: Because my parents never did. We would know after the fact and we, well, / really felt that. There was one time when my mom went for, I think it was an angiogram, which could have been life-threatening, and we didn't know about it until afterwards and had anything happened, it would have been after the fact and too late to say or do anything so that's why.

Vanessa: That is some very interesting memory editing, mom! That is not why we have the policy. You told us that dad was going in for minor tests!

Mom: Oh, yeah, You guys were very small!

Vanessa: You told us that dad was going to the hospital for minor test and it came back and he had brain surgery and had a scar going up his whole face and we were traumatized by thinking that Dad was fine and he wasn't. But go ahead and defend yourself.

Mom: You guys were very young. I think Jonathan was three, you were five, six, David was eight, to try to explain-

Vanessa: You just made us all younger! I was eight, David was ten, Jonathan was five, but yes we were little, I'll grant it.

Mom: I, we just thought it was too much information and not necessary, I think because of the age, I think it was the right thing to do. It would be hard for you guys to comprehend what it was. I definitely would not hide it from you now, you guys know everything about our health now so-

Vanessa: Mom, actually when Dad was sick you actually lost some friends right, you were kind of accused of being too reclusive and secretive. Do you regret that?

Mom: *sighs* No, I truly believe that when somebody is going through a crisis it is the person going to the crisis that should name the shots. I do not have to reach out to somebody who wants to be with me if I'm going through the crisis, that's not my responsibility. I think that if they're true friends the responsibility on them is to either understand that I'm doing whatever I need, or to reach out and say let me know whatever, but. Anybody going through a crisis get the priority.

Vanessa: Do you wanna tell everybody what Cheryl did?

Mom: I had a very good friend, Cheryl, and one day she arrived with cash and with groceries and she said 'I'm sure you need both,' and that was the kindness. Even though she did accuse me of staying in my house and alienating myself. But-

Vanessa: But even though she was frustrated that you were alienating yourself she still showed up with food and money.

Mom: Absolutely.

Vanessa: I think of her a lot.

Mom: She rose to the occasion.

Vanessa: Yeah. Um, I love you and I'll call you from the car

Mom: I love you, honey.

Vanessa: Bye.

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Will Short
Alexander Mark
Jonathan Villalobos

Our music is from Firstcom and Nick Bohl

Special Thanks this week, to Matt Potts and my mom. Thanks mom.