

Mammogram a deux- Excerpt from "My big big adventures in a small small world"

It's a curious thing this business of being a woman.

Today my female center was "brushed" to scrape off tissue (brushed was the word my doctor used) from the part of me that defines me as a woman. Especially these days when penises can be traded for vulvas and vice-versa, my uterus remains the one thing that says she can nest an egg grow a baby, continue the human species. As if I was not mortified enough as I was, propped up, trussed up like a chicken ready to be stuffed, I have to manage the "are you clean enough down there, do you smell good, thoughts racing through my head." I grab a sanitizing wipe in a last minute effort to clean myself some more before the doctor got between my legs to examine me and take samples for various tests. I try to rearrange the mass of my very generous African backside on the hard tissue-covered examination table. I hope from the doctor's perspective a somewhat shapely derriere." I was circumcised as a child doctor". I say, Very matter of fact trying to prepare her for the shock of finding parts of me missing. clitoris and labias removed during the FGM (female genital mutilation) coming of age ceremony performed when I was ten. Mercifully I had been spared the partial sewing of the vagina in addition. (a common practice by some other African Tribes). This, to create a tighter pocket for a future husband's pleasure. I remember the look of confusion and something else on the white male gynaecologist's face few years before when he had examined me and discovered this fact. I wanted to spare doctor C the same. She was warm and very pretty.

How does one manage to look cool and unaffected in that position? Legs up, knees bent, with a metal clamp inside you? The cold device would like a child's toy to open you wider still. Its sharp edges digging into tender flesh exposing your most private self leaving you like a mouth forced open. The whole process not unlike being on the dentist's table. Slightly uncomfortable I squirm. "One more scrape and we're done. I lay there afterwards shamed and terrified. Did the doctor find me tight and clean? Was she horrified by my thick curly bush? Did I look like I have had a fair share of men plunder their way into me? Did I smell of rain, roses or rainbows? And on and on..

Then my thoughts return to doctor C. Does she wake up in the middle of the night from a nightmare? The gaping jaws of a thousand anguished vaginas screaming in silence in her face? A tableau in a horror flick comes to mind. What sights and sounds and smells she must endure my doctor. What would possess someone to study the care of women's vaginas? It has to be love. Pure and simple.

"Since you're here we might as well do your mammogram, you're due you know." I am jolted out of my reverie and scramble to cover myself with the cropped tissue gown especially designed with an open front to leave little room for dignity. I gather the paper wrap around me as best as I can praying it doesn't tear and reveal my already revealed nakedness.

“Sure doctor you’re right. Extra bright smile. Will this day ever end? Fifth floor. “If you have any problems just come back here. Thank you so much doctor . “By the way, you did great. You did really good” . You have no idea. I thought back at how moments earlier I had wanted to keep my legs closed so tight that no amount of trying could have pried them open . An act of rebellion, A clam. No strange eyes and hands on me- in me. Yes I did really good. I had not jumped up and ran down the hallway half-naked with a clamp dangling between my legs fleeing to the room where the sad bundle of my undergarments awaited me.

Hello. Dr C sent me to do a mammogram. ID and Insurance card please. Thank you . Please sign here , fill these and come back to me. All done. Someone will call your name shortly.

Miss K? Yes. “My name is Lynn I will be doing your exam. Take off everything waist up”. I look around for my paper cover. This time there is none. I miss my little-room-for-dignity sheet. No pretence at covering up here. I am trying to hold my my very large very heavy ddd breasts up as I listen to Lynn explain the process . “I am going to place your breast one at a time on this tray and press down hard so I can get a good picture”. Standing there exposed yet again, I am not as embarrassed as I had imagined I would be. Perhaps I was getting used to being made bare and examined by white women with very different body types from me. Cool hands lift up my right breast and place it gently on a plastic tray like a love offering to the machine-god.

I watch her moving it this way and that way looking for an angle only she knew only she could see. I am moved into silence by some unnamable feeling. My usual friendly hello how are you is not forthcoming. Perhaps I am not as embarrassed because this experience of having my breast in a woman’s hands who was neither lover nor friend though unsettling is not so much as having the scarred center of me exposed to strangers . Even if they are my obgyn. I am curiously calm and even somewhat detached.” I am going to press hard.” Don't breathe, don't move”. One boob down. Left breast lifted, positioned, adjusted “don't breathe, don't move” and then we're done. I couldn't help but blurt you must have seen a lot of breasts . “I have seen them all, all different shapes and sizes.” She didn't mention color. Your pictures look great. (That would turn out not to be true later on). I stare at the screen. Those can't be mine! There are two perfectly rounded globes staring at me. It's like looking at an airbrushed picture of yourself-you know it's you but you also know it's not. I thank her and quickly put on my one piece of clothing fast and walk out.