

Mammogram

Lenore Balliro

The Tech:

All day she flattens women's breasts,
flesh squeezed between the flat black plates and fear.
She lifts an arm here, tilts a chin, clicks the shutter
like the man behind black folds who snapped
the daguerreotype of her grandmother's face
staring defiant, or maybe, she thinks, afraid.

The Doctor:

She fits two films together against the screen.
Two halves form one breast, light leaks through them.
She reads what she sees to herself.
At night her dreams spill. Clouds of tissue fill her windows
backlit by moonlight. Someone is pointing here and here
to the denser masses, storms whorling in the night sky.
Someone traces the small dots,
bits of stars lost from their constellations, atypical,
wandering into ducts, clogging the dark.

The Patient:

Waiting for the doctor's words, she remembers
her mother's scars. Rivers, raised from their beds.
Stems in search of flowers. Her daughter's
nipples, no bigger than erasers.
A reservoir of milk in her ducts.
How the mouth fit to nipple at birth.
Fingers seeking the familiar mound
of comfort for sleep. Cheek resting
against the body's pillows.
The hospital gown is worn, thin as the ozone.
She sits with hands in her lap,
small animals frozen from the sudden
flash of light, scent of danger.

Originally published in the Atlanta Review, 1998. Reprinted with the author's permission. Lenore Balliro is a poet and an adult educator.

How Can I Get a Mammogram?

Mammograms are covered by most private health insurance.

If you have Medicare, and you are over 40, you can get a mammogram each year. (For information about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE.)

Even if you don't have private health insurance or Medicare, you might still find low-cost or free mammograms in your community. Call the Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1-800-CDC-INFO to find out more.