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BREAST ISSUES
Ovidia Yu

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BREAST ISSUES

Characters:

SUSIE

MRS LIM

MEI

MONICA

ACT ONE

[VOICES include the voices of the 3 actors]

UNISON:

Some little girls have breasts that are too big

Some little girls have breasts that are too small

Some little girls have breasts that are just right!

MAN'S VOICE: Little girl! Little girl!

YOUNG MEI'S VOICE: Cannot look! Cannot look at me!

MAN'S VOICE: You are the only little girl we've ever had here who's believed that her breasts are just right!

YOUNG MEI'S VOICE: No! I never! I never!

MAN'S VOICE: But here you are all alone, not standing with the girls whose breasts are too big, or with the girls whose breasts are too small!

YOUNG MEI'S VOICE: That's because I think that my left side that breast is too small my right side that breast is too big...

I don't want to play badminton any more!

MEI

Pushing children into sports isn't necessarily going to produce more balanced citizens. I know being a school player in badminton left me more unbalanced than balanced. I told everybody I quit playing because I wanted to concentrate on my studies.

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The truth was, it made me feel too awkward. Because of the badminton, my right arm was larger than my left arm, and my right breast protruded further than my left breast.

I'm still uncomfortable with being looked at.

One advantage of being a doctor is, when people look at you, all they see is authority in a white coat.

[*SUSIE enters fast*]

SUSIE

Mei! Mei! So sorry! I'm here! I'm here!

MEI

Though where your ex-students are concerned, once a tuition teacher, always a tuition teacher!

SUSIE

Hello! I'm so sorry I'm...

Oh, I'm not late.

MEI

Oh yes, you are, Susie. You're nearly fifteen minutes late. Sit down. It just so happens your good friend Monica is even later, that's all!

SUSIE

[*Not sitting. Posing & displaying belly*] It's starting to show, can you see it? Now it's not just my breasts that are all swollen up. You can see it in my stomach too! See?

MEI

Susie, please sit down.

SUSIE

Come on Mei! It's part of our natural cycle! You want to feel it? I don't mind.

MEI

But all these other people trying to have lunch here might, okay!

SUSIE

This is the best part of being pregnant, isn't it? I don't feel sick any more. I'm not yet so huge that I can't move, and I've got these gorgeous huge breasts... Milk producing organs.

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For the first time I've realised I'm a baby-producing machine with milk producing organs attached! Never mind I'm not a big-time lawyer or GM of Raffles Hotel... this is something I'm genetically programmed to do! And I can't do it wrong—my Maternal Instinct should give me all the answers I need!

MEI

The answer I need right now is, 'Where is Monica?' That's the question need answered.

SUSIE

I can't wait to have it feeding at my breast. I really can't imagine what that'll going feel like. Tender sucking lips, the warm shiver as milk responds from deep within me...

MEI

[looking at watch] Like being a gas pump in the petrol station, I imagine.

SUSIE

Oh.

SUSIE (con't)

I can't believe Monica is even later than me. I hope she hasn't forgotten about today. I want to show her how much I've grown! Would you like to see my weight chart?

MEI

I had my receptionist call her with a reminder this morning.

SUSIE

You're so organised, Mei! How are things at the clinic, by the way?

MEI

[shrugging] Most of the time I'm just sitting there handing out Panadol, Panadol, Panadol.

SUSIE

Your receptionist told her it's today, not next week or something, right?

[MEI nods]

MEI

She didn't get to talk to Susie. She said a man answered the phone.

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SUSIE

Monica's had men answering her phone for years!

MEI

A man with an American accent.

SUSIE

Probably just Roger.

MEI

Please! She broke up with Roger long ago!

SUSIE

People do get back together, you know. You split up, then you realise that you can't live without each other...

MEI

I wouldn't know.

SUSIE

[following her own train of thought] But even if Roger wanted to, I'm not sure Monica's ready to take him back. Don't you get the feeling she's seeing somebody else?

MEI

It's not just a feeling, it's a voice on the line!

Susie, Monica has been over Roger for months and this morning another man answered the phone in Monica's apartment.

SUSIE

Another Ang Mo?

MEI

If you ask me, that's why she's late.

SUSIE

I wonder what she's doing right now.

MEI

I wonder.

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[Another part of the stage: dark shapes under a heap of bedclothes. Moaning and giggling]

MONICA

Oooh... yes! Yes! YES!

Oh, yes! Don't stop! Right there! Yes... yes! Yes! YES!

[reaching a high point]

I love you too...

Of course I do...

But I really can't. I tell you, I have to go! My friends will be waiting for me! I'm already late!

[More giggling and tumbling]

Yes... oh you silly, silly man. Of course I love you!

What do you mean which part of you do I love most? I love you all! All of you...

If I had to choose? Just one part?

You gotta ask?

Uhm-Hmm... yes... Yes!

Oh, just a bit higher, yes... Oh, I love everything about you!

Uh-huh... Oooh! Oooooh! You're right there, baby! Give it to me, yes... yes...

Give me... You want to give me What for an engagement present?

[Laughing] What!

[Shocked] What!

[Angry] What!

[Loud bump as something gets kicked out of the bed and onto the floor]

[MALE VOICE howls in pain]

MONICA

I don't care what you landed on! I'm sure you know someone who can fix it!

[MONICA stands up from the bed, fully dressed as the lights come up. She walks over to table where SUSIE and MEI are sitting and joins them]

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MONICA

Can you believe it? That jerk! First he says we should get married because he's never loved anybody as completely and totally as he loves me, completely and totally...

SUSIE

Oh Monica! So romantic! I'm so completely and totally happy for you!

MONICA

And then he says that he wants to give me bigger boobs as a wedding present!

SUSIE

Bigger what?

MEI

[Laughing] What? You're kidding! Sit down.

MONICA

[not sitting] It's not funny. I mean, he means to be nice. And I know he thinks of me as an open-minded woman who doesn't overreact to things, but for a moment I just didn't

know what to say. I mean, do I look like I'm so breast deficient? Huh?

MEI

[looking around to see who else may be listening] Sit down, Monica! People are watching.

SUSIE

You're wearing uplifts, aren't you?

[MONICA sits]

MONICA

I'm not sure what I think. I don't know what I want to think of this. Of him. Of me with these *[gesture]* from him.

SUSIE

I don't understand! Whose big boobs does he want to give you?

MONICA

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My own, of course!

MEI

Breast enhancement surgery, Susie.

If he's talking surgery that can cost quite a bit, you know! Up to \$8,000 and maybe more depending on where you do it!

MONICA

Well, he says it's all on him. On him and in me, so to speak.

SUSIE

I don't believe it! He wanted to give you bigger breasts for your wedding present? How much bigger? Will you have to buy all new bras?

MEI

Wait a minute. Are these bigger breasts supposed to be a present from him to you or from you to him?

[*MONICA shrugs*]

SUSIE

Monica, maybe I'm old fashioned, but I think that for your wedding present, a man should give you something of value that you can treasure all your married life...

I suppose you can treasure big... you know... all your life.

But I think a wedding present should be more romantic.

MONICA

Well, I suppose I could treasure them... [*hefts imaginary breasts*]

And if you want to be romantic, you can say that there will always be a part of him in a part of me.

Two parts of me.

SUSIE

From him, to you...

MEI

—For him... Are you sure you don't prefer something you can sell for cold cash if your hot married life doesn't work out!

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SUSIE

Mei, you're always so cynical. Of course it's going to work out!

MEI

Like jewellery, you know. Something that you can wear, that will make you feel happy and look good; but is also an investment.

MONICA

Well, artificially enhanced breasts may be an investment in all kinds of situations!

[*to herself*] All kinds of jobs, even.

SUSIE

But don't you think he should give you something you can wear, like a ring, that people can look at and think how lucky you are? And that he can look at, on you, and feel proud?

MONICA

Breasts are a bit less obvious than a ring, I suppose.

MEI

Depends what you wear—or don't wear—with them.

SUSIE

But what if other men see you with your bigger breasts and get attracted to you! What if all your friends' husbands start falling for you!

MONICA

[*To MEI, indicating SUSIE*] The more she talks, the more I'm beginning to think this may not be such a terrible idea!

MEI

What I'd like to know is, where did this idea really come from?

MONICA

I told you! Patrick took me completely by surprise when he...

MEI

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So. His name is 'Patrick'. We draw one fact out of chaos. But are you sure you never said anything that might have made him think that you weren't happy with your body? Specifically your [*indicates MONICA'S bosom*]

MONICA

No!

MEI

I mean, I can remember a couple of occasions when you—

MONICA

I said 'No', all right! I've never been sensitive about my breasts. What there is of them...

[*Monica turns away from Mei and Susie to respond to the unseen man*]

MAN'S VOICE

Monica!

MONICA

Yes?

MAN'S VOICE

Monica? Surprise! Look what I got for you! Do you like it?

MONICA

I can't wear that dress. Look how low it's cut in front!

MAN'S VOICE

Like I always say, the more I see of you the better!

MONICA

Come on, look at it—

You need a really stacked chest to carry it off. On me it'll just look... oh, this is stupid.

MAN'S VOICE

What's wrong with it?

MONICA

I can't wear it. I'm sorry you wasted all your money.

MAN'S VOICE

But you like yellow—don't you?

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MONICA

It's not the colour. It's—it's—

I wish I could wear this. I really wish I had the body, but—

MAN'S VOICE

Your body looks fine to me... feels fine to me too...

MONICA

But not to me.

No—I never said anything to make him think that I wasn't happy with my body!

MEI & SUSIE

Hmm...

MONICA

Really. I'm sure.

To tell the truth, I have been considering breast enhancement for some time.

I just don't like some guy thinking I need it!

MRS LIM

Girls these days got too much time. Why worry about how a man sees your body? By the time he gets so close, his eyes are shut, already!

MEI

You don't need it. What's your problem? Too much money or too little brain.

MONICA

Well, I'll be over thirty-five soon—

SUSIE

This year on December 28th—

MONICA

—soon. And the way I see it, it's now or never! If I don't go ahead and do it soon, I won't have any skin elastic enough to put silicon under!

All the money I've set aside for plastic surgery will go to removing wrinkles and cellulite and why should I pay so much just to go on looking the same?

I might as well put my money where it'll make me grow, right?

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MEI

Bravo. Spoken like a true Singaporean.

'I may have been born flat-chested, but I put my faith in science and technology and the sky's the limit!'

SUSIE

But with this kind of surgery there's very little risk, right?

MEI

There's some risk with all surgery. Even in breast enhancement you run the risk of swelling, bruising, bleeding, infection, scarring, numbness, loss of sensation, hardening of the capsule around the breast, leakage of the implant, and changes in mammography.

MONICA

Wah...

SUSIE

Aiyoh! If only there was such a thing as temporary enhancement. Then you can go big to suit some special occasion outfit, but you don't have to carry them around all the rest of the time.

MEI

Of course there's temporary enhancement. Otherwise known as padded bras or false advertising.

[*To Monica*] Have you thought how big you want to go? Or are you going to get the clothes first, then pick the breasts to fit?

MONICA

[*taking her seriously*] I don't know. It's so unfair, isn't it? Some women are just born with them, they don't have to think twice.

MRS LIM

Young women these days, think so much about their own bodies, waste time, waste energy!

Young men these days, same thing!

In my time, don't Think, just Do.

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Otherwise you think today got young people, around, ah?

MEI

You should talk to some woman with really large breasts, you know. The additional back strain may not be such a joy ride long term. You want to find out what it really feels like to be carrying an extra kilogram or so on the front of your chest.

SUSIE

Especially when you're in a hurry and trying to run down an escalator in high heels!

MEI

Research, research, research! Get all the details first!

MONICA

I know... I've thought about it. But every time I try to discuss breasts with a woman who's carrying big breasts around, she just finds some excuse to change the subject—or she gets up and leaves!

MEI

Susie, what do you—

MONICA

Of course! Susie! You've got really big breasts now. Do you feel that when you walk around other people—

SUSIE

[Standing up] Oh Gosh—I'm late! Got to meet my Mum! Bye!

[SUSIE leaves MEI & MONICA]

MONICA

See? It happens every time.

MEI

I'm sure she's really meeting her Mum.

MONICA

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Nah. Unless they're into stand-up comedy, women will do anything to escape talking about their breasts.

MEI

Anyway all the best stand-up comedians with breasts are men.

[On another part of the stage]

[Susie goes up to MRS LIM]

SUSIE

Hi, Mum. Sorry I'm late.

MRS LIM

This morning I phoned your house four times! Why weren't you in? Where did you go? What were you doing? Why aren't you resting!

SUSIE

Don't worry, Ma. I was with Mei.

[MRS LIM snorts]

MRS LIM

What does that one know about getting babies!

SUSIE

Mei says that I should get some exercise.

MRS LIM

Exercise! Rubbish! What nonsense!

You should listen to somebody who has had babies. Not some woman who cannot even get a husband!

SUSIE

Oh, Ma! Mei could have got herself lots of husbands if she wanted. She just didn't want.

MRS LIM

She that kind of woman don't like men ah?

SUSIE

She likes them as men. Not as husbands.

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MRS LIM

Men only good for one thing.

Here. Drink soup. I made for you.

SUSIE

Later, Ma.

MRS LIM

What's wrong with you.

Susie! Don't like that!

I teach all my girls: must sit up straight, must always wear clean panties, no matter how itchy also cannot scratch down there.

Then once you go and get married and go and get pregnant you forget everything. How can!

Susie! Don't touch yourself like that!

SUSIE

My breast hurts, Ma. The left side here. And I think I can feel a lump.

MRS LIM

If you don't touch then you won't feel any lumps.

SUSIE

Oh, Ma. Do you think this is because my breasts are getting ready to produce milk? This is so exciting, isn't it?

MRS LIM

Don't talk so loud about your breasts. And don't touch-touch like that! If you don't think about it then it won't bother you!

SUSIE

But if it's just because of producing milk then I shouldn't worry, right?

MRS LIM

Worry for what! You young girls! Always looking for things to worry! Whole day rushing off to see doctors! What for? Your own mother had more babies than any doctor. Tell you won't listen!

Why are you touching-touching like that again!

SUSIE

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But Ma, it really feels funny here...

MRS LIM

Nothing wrong also go and imagine something wrong. Of course you are going to feel funny!

Wah, my nipples were so sore when you were sucking!

SUSIE

[Smiling to herself] 'Nursing'.

MRS LIM

Sucking, nursing, same thing. Nowadays got this cream, that cream to rub here, rub there... I tell you, put the baby there, cream or no cream, that baby open mouth only will know what to do!

[MRS LIM exits, still shaking her head]

SUSIE

Oh, Ma...

[SUSIE hesitates, then goes to phone]

[phone rings]

[MEI answers phone]

SUSIE *[phone]*

Mei? Hi, it's Susie. I know this is probably just silly, but could I come over and see you? As a doctor, I mean.

MEI

Susie? What's wrong?

SUSIE

No hurry, how busy are you next week? Maybe I could take you to lunch or something. And then we could go back to your clinic.

MEI

Susie, just tell me what it is. Are you all right? Susie? What is it? Is it the baby? Or that husband of yours? Oh, I know—that mother of yours has been trying to make you eat funny Chinese herbs again, is it?

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SUSIE

It's probably nothing, Mei. I just want you to look at something for me. As a doctor I mean ... but no big deal. Maybe Monica can join us for lunch.

MEI

Susie, if you're worried about something you should go and see your own gyne. If you like, I'll come with you...

SUSIE

[overlapping] It's probably just nerves and I'm being silly and imagining things. Silly old Susie worrying about a silly little lump. I'd just like to know what you think, okay?

[Puts down phone]

MEI

Susie, what lump are you talking about? What silly little lump? Susie? Susie?

[Lights out on all except for SUSIE]

SUSIE

I was so happy about being pregnant.

My husband Michael and I didn't plan it like some people do; trying to pick a time of year so that their children wouldn't be too much older or younger than the other children in their class, and wouldn't have their birthdays around exam time.

For us, we knew we were going to have children sooner or later... preferably sooner, of course. It was just something that was going to happen according to God's will, my menstrual cycle, Michael's libido and when all of these things happened to coincide.

I was four months pregnant when I first felt a lump.

I was in the shower, and I was washing myself when I felt this hard lump inside my left breast... around here. It felt like the hard stone inside of a plum.

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[*MEI to MONICA on different part of stage.*]

MEI

She says she can feel a lump. I told her to come in and see me. It's probably just a cyst or something. Pregnant women can get a bit funny. She's treating me to lunch first. She asked me to see if you can join us.

MONICA

OK. Where?

MEI

We're meeting at the Brasserie...

[*SUSIE comes over to join them in the loo scene*]

SUSIE

That was a great lunch. Mei, if you're not in a hurry, can we just stop by Marks & Spencers first? Just now when I was coming in I saw they had mother things and baby things—so cute!

MEI

I have to be back in the clinic by 2 whether you come with me or not!

SUSIE

They had these maternity tops that open here like that...

MONICA

Can be useful for things other than babies, you know!

Like if you're a hooker with bad legs.

[*strikes streetwalker pose, flashing tit*] Like what yer see... Baybeh!

[*MONICA & SUSIE laugh MEI just looks at them*]

MONICA

Don't you get the feeling she's going to say, 'stop laughing and get on with your work!'

SUSIE

Oh, Mei. Can't you just take a quick look quickly now and tell me everything's okay, then I can go and shop?

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MONICA

If she's going to look at your breast now, can I feel it?

SUSIE

What? Oh. Sure.

MEI

Why do you want to feel it?

MONICA

Oh, just to see, you know. What it feels like.

SUSIE

Can you feel the lump?

MONICA

What lump?

MEI

You just wanted to feel her breast?!

MONICA

Do you know if silicon warms up to body temperature all the way through?

SUSIE

You want to feel it too?

MEI

Well, why not...

I expected it to feel smooth. Smooth and not hard. Mobile.

SUSIE

Mei sounded so confident that it was nothing. At first.

MEI

But it wasn't. It was hard. Hard and craggy and...

Oh Shit!

SUSIE

What?

MEI

Nothing!

SUSIE

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What?

MEI

Nothing... I'm sorry,. I don't know what I'm talking about...

You don't have to come to the clinic today. Why not go shopping instead?

What you should do is... is... get some tests done. I've got a friend who's a radiologist at Mt. E. I'll give him a call. No hurry. No hurry at all. Are you free tomorrow? Like say 9am? Unless I can get an appointment for 8:30?

SUSIE

An appointment? What for?

MEI

Oh... just to have a look at your lump.

Ultrasound and a mammogram... all the equipment's there in the same building, shouldn't cost you more than two hundred dollars...

SUSIE

[*ASIDE*] I could see that Mei was worried, even though she was trying very hard not to show it.

MONICA

A mammogram is no big deal. Just to make sure... right? Susie? Mei?

SUSIE

Mei?

[*MEI does not answer right away*]

SUSIE

Are you free? Tomorrow, I mean? Like could you come with me?

MEI

[*ASIDE*] Thursday was a really heavy day for me. Just thinking about how many patients my receptionist would have to reschedule gave me a headache.

[*To SUSIE*] Nah, I don't have anything on tomorrow. Of course I'll come with you.

SUSIE

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It's just that—I don't want to tell Michael or even my Mum about it yet. Not until I know what it is. And I really don't want to go alone.

MEI

I'm not an unreasonable feminist woman, blaming everything on my gender. I do my job as well as any man, and the system treats me as shabbily as it would treat any man. Probably treat him worse.

But if you're a woman, nothing changes the fact that when you walk into a room, (unless you have a really big nose) your breasts precede the rest of you.

Nothing changes the fact that on a really hot day, a man can get away with the thinnest cotton shirt but you have to wear a bra or tape Elastoplast on your nipples.

Nothing changes the fact of breast cancer.

[MEI crosses to SUSIE, we see MEI being briskly efficient & organised]

[MONICA, separate from SUSIE & MEI, talks to her shrink]

MONICA

Dr. Wilkinson, I've been thinking seriously about what you said—about how I should take responsibility for making my life the way I want it.

And I've decided to start with my body.

I'm thinking about breast enhancement.

Dr. Wilkinson, are you all right?

All my life I have been a large breasted woman trapped in a small-breasted body.

Now I want to give my body the breasts it deserves.

Done in Singapore, the operation will probably cost me between six and eight thousand dollars and take one to two hours. I can afford the money, and what one to two hours in the gym could ever make such a difference to my looks?

I'm really taking charge of my life, aren't I!

What they put inside me will probably be saline or silicone although there's talk now of using soyabean oil for implants.

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[holds her breasts] If I ever get marooned on a desert island, my breasts may keep me going for a day or two.

The surgeon will put me under general anaesthetic. He or she will make an incision in my armpit, or around my nipple, and the implants will be placed directly beneath my breast tissue...

When I wake up they'll be there. And what's on top will be my own breast tissue, still warm to the touch...

My implants should last for fifteen to twenty years, unless I fall down and rupture something. Just imagine, falling down and getting up lopsided, with the contents of one breast trickling down into your abdomen...

Yes, Dr Wilkinson?

Dr Wilkinson, I know that things like the size of your breasts and the depth of your cleavage shouldn't matter.

They don't matter to women who already have them.

Women whose breasts grew up the same time they did.

YOUNG MEI

You're fifteen years old, and you still doesn't wear a Bra?

YOUNG MONICA

I don't need a bra. Yet.

YOUNG SUSIE

She's still wearing a singlet! When we were changing for PE I saw!

[more girlish giggles. MONICA covers her chest self-consciously]

MONICA

Dr Wilkinson, Susie was my best friend in school. When Mei started giving us tuition, she was already in Pre-U and all grown up, but Susie already wore the same bra size as her. And there I was in my singlets...

When I finally started wearing bras, it was to push myself out rather than hold myself up. They were so painful! Heavily padded, under-wired, uplift bras...

but if you don't have tissue there, there's nothing to lift.

That's when I started feeling inadequate...

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Even around Mei and Susie... they were my closest friends, my bosom buddies, and me with bosom inadequacy.

Breast enhancement isn't such a big deal is it?

I have as much a right to big, beautiful breasts as any other woman!

Why should I be doomed to life as a flat-chester!

Dr. Wilkinson?

Oh, is my time up?

MRS LIM

Mad! No need operation also want to cut! Painful eh!

MONICA

It's not going to hurt as much as foot-binding must have!

MEI

The lump I felt on Susie's breast was hard and not mobile. It was a very ominous sign. I didn't want to alarm Susie, but I was scared. Very, very scared.

I didn't sleep at all that night. I kept thinking of breast cancer. Breast cancer in my

friend's four month pregnant body.

[*To SUSIE*] Are you sure you wouldn't rather ask Michael to go with you? Or your Mum?

SUSIE

[*To MEI*] Of course not! Come on, we're having lunch again after, right? Don't back out on me now!

MEI

I don't think Susie realised how bad it could be. She had worried about the lump, but once she told me about it, she thought medical science would take over. And make her well again.

She's in a cocoon of happy pregnancy, focusing only on her baby.

I suppose it wouldn't have helped if she had stayed up all night and worried.

It didn't help that I did.

For the first time in years I tried praying.

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SUSIE

I know Mei's worried, but Mei always worries about everything!
It's true. I am so happy to be so pregnant. I didn't realise till now that being pregnant is a state of total immersion. I feel as though every pore in my body is so alive, alive and aware that there is another life growing inside me!

SUSIE

Mei! Over here! Thanks for coming with me!

MEI

The mammogram and ultrasound should cost you about \$200. You should be finished in under an hour—

SUSIE

I know. You told me. And then after that I have to buy some things.

MEI

Things?

SUSIE

For the baby. You'll come with me, won't you?
It's lucky we came today. I just found another lump under my armpit last night. It's only about the size of a marble. Do you think children still play marbles nowadays? Since we're here I can tell them about it at the same time.

MEI

I realised praying hadn't helped at all.
Susie was so cheerful that day. I wanted to say, 'Don't be so happy. It can all come crashing down!'
[pauses to give big, fake, smile & thumbs up to SUSIE]
But as I watched the technicians take her into the back room... I realised maybe she did know. Maybe that's why she's holding on to her happiness with both hands, for as long as she can.

[pause]

I had to go to the toilet three times while I was waiting for her.

SUSIE

Mei?

MEI

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[leaping to attention] Yes!

SUSIE

The surgeon wants to talk to me... he says it's better if I have a friend or family member with me. Can you come in?

MEI

Of course!

Of course, of course, of course.

Are you sure you don't want me to call Michael?

SUSIE

[shaking head] I want to find out what's happening inside me.

Then I'll talk to Michael.

[SUSIE and MEI sit side by side]

SUSIE

What does he mean 'obviously a cancer'?

MEI

He means it's probably cancer.

SUSIE

Oh.

[MEI reaches across and puts a hand over one of SUSIE'S]

SUSIE

What does he mean 'not much time'?

MEI

He means in cases like this, it's best to work fast.

SUSIE

Oh.

[They listen]

SUSIE

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What does he mean it's just a question of how much comes off?

MEI

It means he scores minus points for EQ!

SUSIE

What?

MEI

Nothing.

SUSIE

He says these are just the preliminary results. That means it may not really be cancer at all, right?

MEI

It means...

Susie, I don't want to alarm you but you should be aware that—

The fact of the matter in cases like this is—

Susie, we shouldn't generalise, but generally speaking—

SUSIE

[Overlapping with the later part of MEI'S speech]

I've never known Mei to have trouble explaining anything.

But she wasn't just having trouble explaining, she seemed to be having trouble breathing.

MEI

[simultaneously] I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

SUSIE

The surgeon was staring at us like he suddenly didn't know which of us was the patient. He offered both of us Kleenex.

Thanks. Mei, Mei?

MEI

Susie, I am so sorry.

SUSIE

You just helped me to find it. Whatever it is. You didn't cause it.

MEI

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[Instantly pulling herself together] They're going to schedule a mastectomy.

SUSIE

A mastectomy was scheduled.

MEI

You do understand what's happening, don't you?

[Susie nods]

SUSIE

I don't understand what the hell was happening.

Just don't hurt my baby.

I know I should be frightened, worried, terrified, panicky... but I'm just feeling so numb. I should be glad that it's only my breast, right? This cancer business? I mean if it was my liver or my kidneys or my lungs or my heart it would be so much worse, right? But breasts aren't so essential...

[hands on her breasts]

I mean, what are breasts, anyway? Just appendages... milk-producing appendages.

[Hands move protectively down to her abdomen]

Lots of babies are bottle-fed. They grow up fine. Healthy.

They do.

MEI

Susie? Do you want me to call Michael? Or your Mum?

SUSIE

It's just a breast... a person can live perfectly well with just one breast, right? I should be lucky it's just in my breast... I mean, what are breasts for, anyway!

[VOICES of A & B come on as MEI and SUSIE embrace. These may be male voices]

MRS LIM

As breasts, we lie between your 2nd and 6th ribs in the vertical axis.

MONICA

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Through the ages we have been celebrated by painters, poets, sculptors and couturiers.

MRS LIM

Made of milk producing glands and fat cells, we form two mounds with our bases spread along an adult woman's chest wall.

MONICA

We have no muscles at all. We're very, very feminine. Feminine, soft, nourishing and nurturing.

MRS LIM

We are completely supported by the skin around us... skin and ligaments like the Cooper's ligaments that run from our nipples to the pectoral muscles.

MONICA

Through the ages, we have provided irresistible to young children and old men...

MRS LIM

We have very sensitive nerve endings,

MONICA

And we often play an active role in sex, being aroused as often as we arouse...

[MEI and SUSIE stand back from each other]

MEI

Susie? You still want to buy something before going back...?

SUSIE

For the baby. Yes. I have to.

[MEI leaves SUSIE. MRS LIM goes to her]

MRS LIM

Hiyah! Why must you go and believe what that Mei tells you?

SUSIE

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It's not what Mei told me, Ma. Mei just came with me. It was the doctor, the surgeon, who told me.

MRS LIM

Why should you have cancer? Doctors always look for the worst thing to say. It's their job to find things wrong with you, what. Otherwise how can they make money?

SUSIE

Ma. They're going to cut off my left breast.

MRS LIM

Don't let them.

SUSIE

Ma, I either live with one breast or I die with two.

[*pause*]

MRS LIM

Did you tell Michael yet?

SUSIE

[*shaking head*] I wanted to tell him on the phone, but he was so happy and so excited, talking about how next year this time we would be getting ready to celebrate our first Christmas with our first baby, I just couldn't...

I thought, I'll just let him have one more happy day... one more happy night.

As long as he doesn't know I can pretend for a little while longer that nothing's wrong.

I'll tell him tonight.

MRS LIM

Don't tell him.

SUSIE

What?

MRS LIM

Don't tell him. Men don't like to know about things like that.

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SUSIE

Ma! I'm sure he's going to notice! I have to have an operation—they have to cut this off—

MRS LIM

Get a second opinion first.

SUSIE

And if that says the same thing?

MRS LIM

Then get a third opinion!

SUSIE

Ma, you're just being stupid!

No matter how many doctors I go and see, they're all going to say the same thing! I've got this thing growing in my body and I want them to get it out of me!

[on other side of stage, MEI and MONICA]

MONICA

Oh Dear! That's so terrible! Poor, poor Susie! Does she really have to go for surgery? I can't imagine losing one breast! How will her husband feel about it! It's so terrible! She'll never be able to wear any kind of low cut neckline ever again!

MEI

Monica, I never expect much from you and yet somehow you manage to disappoint me.

MONICA

Maybe if she wears a bra to bed he won't really notice...

SUSIE

Of course he noticed. He was there when I woke up. After the operation. I couldn't bring myself to look down at myself at first. I was afraid that there would be this great big gaping wound here. It was Michael who kissed me and drew my fingers down to my chest...

There was no open wound... just smooth chest... like a baby's chest.

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Michael put his face against my smooth baby's chest and said that all my losing a breast meant to him was that he could get closer to my heart...

MEI

I suppose how a husband reacts in such a situation tells you something about what kind of man you're married to.

MONICA

But by that time you either already know you got lucky or it's too late!

SUSIE

Michael was so sweet.

But though he tried, I soon realised that this was something that I couldn't truly share with him.

It was like being pregnant. No matter how you try to share it with a man, no matter how hard he tries to understand, you're both know that what you're going through is not something he's ever going to go experience.

My breast was really gone.

I didn't even have a nipple any more.

And along here, there was a thin stapled line...

[MEI on another part of the stage, briskly]

MEI

I knew it wouldn't just end with the operation.

They would be on the look out for malignant lymph nodes.

If surgery revealed just one or two malignant nodes, they would be removed.

Susie could continue with her pregnancy, no problem. Probably they would recommend radiation, but if the cancer hadn't spread, it could wait a few months.

But if there were three or more malignant nodes...

MONICA

How is she?

MEI

Well, we should do all we can to cheer her up. Take her mind off it.

MONICA

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Oh, I'm good at taking people's minds off things.

[MONICA picks up phone and calls SUSIE]

[phone rings. SUSIE picks it up]

SUSIE

Hello?

MONICA

[phone] Susie? Hi! It's Monica! How are you feeling? Got a minute to talk about breasts? I thought that maybe since you had yours taken off you might want to think about putting one back in. Did you know you get to choose the size you want? I thought it depended on your body structure or something, but I can go right up to a D-cup if I want to, isn't that fantastic? Of course I won't, but it's something just to fantasise about, isn't it! I thought at first I'd ask Patrick to help me choose... but supposing we don't agree... Maybe a C-cup. I really think that I might dare to! Why pay so much and go for surgery and everything just to go from an A to a B, right?

Susie? Are you there?

SUSIE

[phone] Monica, they found four malignant lymph nodes inside me.

[SUSIE puts down phone. MONICA stands frozen]

MONICA

Susie? Susie are you there? Mei? Mei?

MEI

The cancer has spread. They want to begin chemotherapy immediately.

[To MONICA] I can tell that they are also trying to strongly recommend, without saying those actual words, that she terminates her pregnancy.

MONICA

You mean kill the baby?

MEI

She should have a termination. The treatment she needs could seriously harm the foetus.

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MONICA

But the baby—

MEI

It's going to die anyway. She needs the treatment she needs to save her life.
Otherwise

they could both die.

MONICA

Somebody should tell her.

MEI

Somebody should.

[Monica heads for Susie. Mei follows.]

SUSIE

The mastectomy did not bother me as much as I thought it would. At one time,
it had been important to me to breast-feed my child. Now I was only want my
child born healthy.

I will not have an abortion.

I will not expose my child to chemotherapy drugs.

I will hold off having treatment until after my child is born.

MEI

If she waits, the cancer will grow unchecked.

MONICA

Susie, you have to start treatment right away! Otherwise it may be too late!
Your cancer will grow unchecked!

[Susie shakes heads]

MEI

She should think of Michael—

MONICA

Susie, what about Michael? Do you think you're being fair to Michael?

SUSIE

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Do you think it's fair that I have cancer?

MRS LIM

Susie, Susie, don't talk so much. Here, I boil soup for you. Drink, drink, drink!

MONICA

Susie, I think you should start thinking about reconstruction surgery

MEI

[*to SUSIE*] I think you should think about Michael instead of just saying 'No Chemo'

MRS LIM

Drink now while still hot!

MONICA

She shouldn't keep the baby, because it may be horribly deformed if it's born alive and poor Michael, but they could think about getting a Vietnamese orphan...

MRS LIM

You! Talking about what!

MEI

[*warningly*] Monica—

MONICA

She should abort—I mean, [*looking at Mei to confirm the term*] 'terminate' the pregnancy.

SUSIE

'Terminate'

MONICA

I think it's the same thing as having an abortion.

MRS LIM

Luk Toi... ?

SUSIE

Luk Toi?

MRS LIM

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Luk Toi! Luk Toi! Luk Toi! (Angrily directed at Mei and Monica)

Leave my daughter alone!

Susie I think you should go and lie down—

MEI

Susie, I think you should listen to what—

MONICA

Susie, I think you don't realise the baby may be—

SUSIE

Who cares what you all think!

Fuck you! Fuck all of you!

Just leave me alone!

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

[MEI on stage, looking severely out at audience]

MEI

Are you ready?

May I remind you to turn off all pagers, mobile phones and any other beeping devices you may be carrying?

Thank you.

According to the Singapore Cancer Registry, in 1968, eighteen out of every 100,000 women had breast cancer. In 1992 it was forty out of every 100,000 women. The figure's has more than doubled, is still rising, and we still don't know why. Think about that. It's frightening, isn't it? Whether you are a woman or whether there's a woman who's important to you.

Diet, lifestyle, air pollution... any or all of these factors could be to blame. But it doesn't help to know that when you already have something alien growing inside you.

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Studies show that women who share certain characteristics are at the highest risk of breast cancer.

One: women who have fat deposited around their waists. This is a pattern of obesity normally associated with men.

Two: Women who have a family history of breast cancer. If you have grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins who have breast cancer, you should realise that you are at higher risk of encountering the disease.

Three: Tall women. Women who are over 1.59m tall are twice as likely to get breast cancer as women under 1.5m tall.

Four: Women who have never given birth, or who have their first baby late in life are at higher risk.

Five: Women who experience late menopause are at higher risk. Menopause usually occurs when a woman is between forty-five and fifty years old. Each additional pre-menopause year increases your breast cancer risk by 5%.

Breasts are tissue, are nothing more than human tissue massed into heaps on top of your chest wall. Some women have more, some have less.

Don't ignore them—but don't expand them out of proportion either.

If you ever have to choose between keeping a breast and losing your life, what would your decision be?

[MEI looks pointedly at SUSIE]

MEI

So, Susie. Have you thought about getting started on your treatment?

SUSIE

I've thought about it, yes.

MEI

Susie, some decisions can't be made slowly and carefully. Otherwise you'll just go on forever, gathering more information, interpreting and reinterpreting facts and feelings...

But it's a hopeless job because there are so many arguments on both sides.

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Think of an ATM top up machine in an MRT stations. If you slide your card through a top up machine slowly and carefully it doesn't register.

Sometimes you see people standing there not realising that. They slide their cards through over and over again, each time more slowly. They say to the queue growing longer and longer behind them that there's something wrong with the machine.

The point is that you have to slide your card through the machine quickly. Make up your mind, put in your card and slide it down. Fast. Then get on with your life. That's how you make a decision like this.

Do you hear what I'm saying, Susie?

[*SUSIE nods numbly*]

MEI

Well, Susie?

SUSIE

I didn't know you used the MRT. You've got a car. But it's faster, right? I mean the MRT gets you places faster. I'm always afraid of missing the right stop and then not knowing where I am when I do get off.

MEI

Susie... Chemotherapy?

SUSIE

I heard that if I took Panadol and coffee when I was pregnant, even that could affect my baby. So I wasn't going to; no Panadol, no alcohol, no caffeine, no going to places with cigarette smoke... nothing that might harm my baby. Of course I'm not going for chemotherapy.

MEI

Wait, wait, wait. Susie, some decisions you shouldn't make so quickly!

Stop and consider all the alternatives first.

It's not just yourself you have to think of, you know.

[*SUSIE nods*]

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[*Silence*]

MEI

Think of Michael. Don't be so selfish.

SUSIE

Selfish?

MEI

If you don't make it—what happens to him?

[*SUSIE leaves MEI*]

[*MEI goes over to MRS LIM*]

MEI

Hello Aunty.

MRS LIM

Susie not in.

MEI

Oh...

What time will she be—

[*Mrs Lim shrugs elaborately, not looking at Mei.*]

[*Mei hesitates, then turns to go*]

MEI

I just wanted to tell her... Never mind. I'll give her a call later.

MRS LIM

Come all the way here, cannot even stay for one minute. Don't even want to leave a message.

MEI

I'm sorry. I thought you were busy and I didn't want to disturb you, that's all.

MRS LIM

Busy? Do I look so busy?

[*Mrs Lim does not stop plucking tow gay as she talks*]

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MEI

I thought you looked busy.

[Mrs Lim, still plucking, snorts]

MRS LIM

Nobody has time to talk to old people. You young people, you are the ones that are always so busy, so busy!

You don't even have time to ask me where did Susie go today.

MEI

Where did Susie go today, Aunty?

MRS LIM

I don't know. She doesn't tell me anything.

I should go out and disappear myself. See if she likes how it feels!

MEI

I'm sure Susie doesn't want to worry you, Aunty. She just needs some time by herself.

MRS LIM

Why won't Susie tell me what's wrong with her? Why won't she talk to me!

[Mei taken aback by sudden attack]

MEI

I'm sure she will. When she's ready.

MRS LIM

In the middle of the day, when that Michael of hers is at work. I walk into their room, my Susie is there crying. Lying on the bed, crying.

I get so scared. I say, 'What's wrong! What's wrong!'

And you know what? Susie gets so angry with me. She says, 'How dare you come into my room without knocking!'

As though she got something to hide from me like that! Her own mother!

MEI

She's not hiding anything from you, Aunty.

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[*to herself*] Susie... crying.

[*Mei holds herself as though stabbed by a physical pain*]

MRS LIM

I was only going to put back the clothes that I finish ironing. Why should she get angry with me! And then before that Michael of hers comes home she will get up, put on powder, like nothing wrong like that.

MEI

[*Quietly*] Why are you telling me this, Aunty?

MRS LIM

You are a doctor.

[*MEI nods but does not speak*]

MRS LIM

Is my Susie going to get well?

MEI

She—could... I hope she will.

MRS LIM

Is she going to get well or not? You cannot say 'Yes' is it!

MEI

I'm not her doctor, I shouldn't be discussing—

MRS LIM

After so many years you have been friends, after so many times I cook dinner for you to eat here, you cannot answer me one small thing! Now I know how much you care for Susie! [*snorts*]

MEI

Of course I care for Susie! I just wish she would go for chemo and get this bloody thing out of her system, that's all!

[*MRS LIM looks at her. MEI leaves*]

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[MRS LIM kneels with joss sticks]

MRS LIM

Ah Yuet ah, you see your daughter. So young, so pretty.
Now her first baby not even born yet, already so many problems.
They say she may die.

[SUSIE stands behind MRS LIM, listening]

MRS LIM

Susie was such a good baby. Always smiling, always happy... pretty, not too clever.

Girls too clever is no good. Look at that Mei. So smart and still can't get married.

Sometimes when I was very busy, like just before Chinese New Year, I make Susie miss school, stay at home to help me look after her younger sisters and help me to cook and do cleaning. Susie never complained.

That girl was born to be a good mother.

When that Mei first came to give maths tuition to Susie and Monica, she made them study so hard. I told her 'No need to push too hard. Pass is good enough'.. She said, 'But Susie can get an 'A'!

I don't care my Susie gets 'A' or not.

I don't want my Susie to die.

It is so terrible for a mother to watch her baby die before her.

I am her mother. She is also a mother now. Nearly.

What to do now I don't know.

[Sings part of Cantonese lullaby]

I don't know what to do.

I don't know what to do.

[MRS LIM turns and sees SUSIE]

SUSIE

Ma?

MRS LIM

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Susie! I didn't know you came! How are you feeling? Do you want a hot drink?
Do you want to sit down? Can I get you anything?
I got some soup nearly ready, just let me go and warm it up...

SUSIE

No soup right now, Ma. I'm all right.
Ma, I want to talk to you. You know they have tests to detect breast cancer?
Something called a mammogram. I want you to go and get yourself tested.
And I'm going to call Jessie and Minnie and tell them to go and get tested too.

[MRS LIM is silent]

SUSIE

If you have a close relative with breast cancer, your chances of getting it go
up. Since I have breast cancer, it means that you are all at higher risk. Better
go and get tested.

[MRS LIM is silent]

SUSIE

Do you hear me? If you have it, the earlier you catch it, the better your
chances are.

MRS LIM

I got one daughter sick not enough. Now you say all my other daughters sick
also!

For myself I don't care. They want to cut off my breasts. My children are big
already. My husband—*[looks at joss sticks]*

But my daughters are still young! What about my grandchildren!

Ngo mang kum foo

SUSIE

You're not the one it's happening to, Ma.

[SUSIE leaves MRS LIM]

MRS LIM

Susie?

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[*On another part of the stage*]

MEI

I don't believe it! She really said that and walked away from that mother of hers?

MONICA

[*Nodding*] Uh-uh. Finally. I suppose that's one good thing that has come out of all this! Susie's never disagreed with her Mum before. Not even in her mind!

MEI

But her poor Mum too. It's terrible for the family as well when this happens. Some people say it's worse for close relatives than for the person who's actually sick.

MONICA

Yes, but that just makes me feel more sorry for Michael. I wonder how he's really feeling.

I'm only a friend and I'm finding it difficult enough to talk to her!

I don't know what it's right to say, I'm not sure what's the right thing to do...

MEI

I know. You don't know whether doing something shows that you care or shows that you're afraid she's having trouble coping.

MONICA

Exactly! Poor Susie.

It must be so difficult for her too, trying to decide the right thing to do!

MEI

The right thing for her to do is obvious!

MONICA

Is it?

MEI

She's not doing herself or Michael any favours by refusing treatment.

MONICA

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It's the baby she's worried about...

MEI

There is a very good chance Susie can save her own life. She should take it.

MONICA

Mei, this is probably a stupid question, but did Susie getting pregnant 'bring on' the cancer?

MEI

Not exactly.

MONICA

'Not exactly'?

MEI

Her being pregnant would make the cancer spread faster. But it must already have been there inside her. Breast cancer is oestrogen-dependent. That means that all the hormones flooding your system when you are pregnant makes you a wonderful environment for the cancer to grow and spread in. And there's another theory that suggests cancer spreads more easily when you're pregnant because pregnancy often weakens the immune system.

MONICA

So Susie being pregnant is making her weaker?

Your Mum wasn't pregnant when she got breast cancer.

MEI

My mother refused chemotherapy. She was frightened, she didn't know what was happening to her...

She was dead six months later.

I should have insisted. I should have forced her to go for chemo, but I was young and

inexperienced and...

MONICA

Mei?

MEI

I should have insisted.

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I could have spent the next twenty years apologizing to her, at least she would have been alive to hear me.

I should have pushed harder.

MONICA

Mei, it wasn't your fault your mother died.

MEI

I can't stand by and watch the same thing happen to Susie.

It's obvious what she should do.

MONICA

Tell her, then. Come on.

MEI

I can't.

MONICA

Susie trusts you. She'll listen to you.

MEI

You. Are you doing regular self-examinations?

MONICA

[adjusts bra strap] I know I should. I'm almost afraid to touch myself around here now, in case I find something!

MEI

You are doing regular breast self-examinations, aren't you?

MONICA

[vaguely] Of course I keep meaning to...

MEI

Are you? Doing regular breast self-examinations?

MONICA

Well, are you doing breast self-examinations regularly?

[MEI does not answer immediately]

MONICA

Well?

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[*silence*]

[*During following sequence, MEI turns her back to the audience*]

MEI

Every woman should learn to examine herself.

Try to do it regularly, get to know your body, become familiar with its patterns and its pulses; with its rhythms and routines...

Then if something changes, you will be the first to know, as you should be.

Lie back on a flat, firm surface.

When you are examining your right breast, put a pillow under your right shoulder. Put your right hand behind your head. Use your fingers like this, not your thumb. Circle the entire area, moving inwards towards the nipple.

And press gently. You are examining the texture of your breast tissue, not the bones underneath. Those hard ridges you feel there are your ribs. There's nothing wrong with feeling your ribs. You are one body, get to know yourself, be gentle with yourself...

Know what you are feeling for...

Any difference, any irregularity...

There are parts of you that only you can examine.

There are depths to you that only you can explore.

MONICA

So you do regular self-examinations yourself?

MEI

I prefer to go for a mammogram every six months.

MONICA

Why?

MEI

It's better than a self-examination. Shows up things that you may miss or may not be large enough for you to detect.

MONICA

Why?

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MEI

What do you mean why? I just told you!

MONICA

You're uncomfortable with the idea, aren't you?

MEI

I prefer to get accurate results.

MONICA

You prefer to have a machine touch you.

Mei, as long as you're not comfortable touching your own body, you won't be comfortable letting any one else touch it either.

MEI

Hasn't been a problem so far.

MONICA

And you've got quite a nice body too. You're not flat-chested like me.

MEI

You don't know how god dammed lucky you are. To have two flat, healthy breasts!

MONICA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset—

MEI

There are people who would give anything to have a pair of healthy breasts like yours!

MONICA

Okay. Okay. Hey, I said I'm sorry.

MEI

No, I'm sorry. But even examining yourself regularly isn't as good as going for regular mammograms.

MONICA

All right. I bear that in mind.

[MONICA and SUSIE picnic scene]

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MONICA

And then she just lost her temper and got so mad at me—

SUSIE

It's beautiful here, isn't it? I'm so glad the haze is finally lifting. You can see so far out now.

MONICA

Oh. Yeah. And she said I should consider myself lucky because I had two healthy breasts...

SUSIE

I love the smell of salt water. There's something so basic and reassuring about sand, sky and sea... it looked like that a hundred years ago and it'll look like that in a hundred years time.

MONICA

If they don't stick a bunch of high-rise flats there.

Mei's just concerned about you, you know, Susie. I know sometimes she can come on a bit strong, but that's only because she's got into this habit of looking after us.

SUSIE

She had no business telling me what to do like that.

And she certainly had no business going to talk to my mother.

MONICA

How *is* your Mum? I was surprised she wasn't home just now.

SUSIE

Fine. She's been going out more. Every day, in fact. I suppose she needs her own space too.

MONICA

Where does she go?

SUSIE

[*shrugs*] One thing I've learnt from Ma is not to ask too many questions! Just like I'm learning from Mei how irritating it is to have somebody trying to tell you what to do!

MONICA

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She's worried because there's a life at stake.

SUSIE

Two lives at stake. You think I don't realise that?

MONICA

It's really beautiful here, isn't it?

SUSIE

[*not looking at MONICA*] Monica, if anything happens to me, tell my baby about me, okay?

MONICA

Come on, Susie—

SUSIE

Tell my baby about days like this, about how we used to sit and talk and eat ice-cream, about how much I loved Michael... okay?

MONICA

Of course I will.

SUSIE

How's whatshisname... the breast enhancement guy you were seeing?

MONICA

Okay I guess. I'm not seeing much of him these days.

SUSIE

Not because of... [*discreet indication of relevant portion of anatomy*]

MONICA

No.

SUSIE

At least he came right out and talked about what was on his mind.

MONICA

And he made me realise something about myself: how much I wanted that operation. How much I wanted those beautiful, big breasts. I already have a large breasted personality; all I need now is the body to fit.

But I didn't want to him to give it to me. I want to achieve the body of my dreams for myself.

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Anyway, right now it seems such a trivial thing to be thinking about.

SUSIE

I wish you'd go through with it. And let me know exactly what's involved.

MONICA

In breast enhancement surgery?

SUSIE

I might be interested—someday—and I want to find out as much as I can.

MONICA

Well, I've narrowed it down to this; saline or silicon?

I know that saline is more likely to leak, but then it's less harmful if it does leak. Mei, what do you think?

[SUSIE turns in some surprise]

SUSIE

Mei?

MEI

Hello, Susie.

MONICA

I told her we were going to be here. Susie, you don't mind, do you?

I haven't said anything to her about chemo yet.

SUSIE

What!

MEI

Monica!

MONICA

Oh, sorry—what did I say? Oh...

[SUSIE looks angrily at MEI]

MEI

Going for chemotherapy is for your own good.

SUSIE

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And I will. Once this little fellow's on his own.

[MEI stands up and walks away, it is an effort for her not to say more here]

MONICA

'His' own? You know it's going to be a boy?

SUSIE

I hope it's going to be a boy.

MONICA

You're so Chinese!SUSIE

No! I wanted a girl—we wanted a girl—to start our family of maybe four, maybe five children...

Michael and I, we thought we'd plan on four. Then have a fifth one come along as a surprise. But that was before we found out about this thing growing inside me.

Now I hope it's a boy because if she's a boy—she won't ever have to worry about being in a high risk category because of me. Because of my—

[unable to go on]

MONICA

Hey, I'm sorry. Susie, I didn't mean to upset you.

[SUSIE shakes head absolvingly]

MONICA

I'm so sorry, Susie darling!

SUSIE

It's not easy being a man either. Watching Michael, I realise that the breasts that hurt you the most don't have to be growing out of your own body.

MONICA

Watching Michael?

SUSIE

[nods] Michael is so good to me. But I can tell that all this is hurting him almost more than it hurts me. I was looking at him last night, and it's like he's

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suddenly become an old man. I feel like I'm robbing him of what should be the best part of his life.

If only he had married somebody else, he would be making plans for the future, not wondering how much longer his wife is going to live and whether the insurance is going to hold out or not.

I wish he had married some other woman. Some healthy woman with two healthy breasts. He could have been so happy now—

MONICA

Susie, you go on talking like that I'm going to slap your face!

SUSIE

What?

MONICA

Michael's a great guy who loves you. If the best you can say to him is you wish he'd married somebody else, then you're right. You really don't deserve him!

Look, if something was happening to Michael, if he had one of his you-know [*gesture towards groin*] cut off, would you wish you had married somebody else? Somebody intact down there?

SUSIE

Of course not!

MONICA

So?

SUSIE

I know.

He used to say I had such beautiful breasts, you know. Before we were married. He used to massage moisturiser into my skin so tenderly...

MONICA

Before you were married?

SUSIE

Well... [*small giggle*] ... and after, too.

MONICA

All right, all right. It's not like I'm going to tell a priest or something!

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SUSIE

He used to say how much he loved my breasts. He said that they were so womanly. So erotic and yet so comforting. So delicate and yet so nurturing...

MONICA

I never knew Michael could talk like that!

SUSIE

[small smile] And now it's like the part of me that was the most beautiful for him is being taken away from him. I can't help feeling that I've cheated him somehow.

Sorry I'm running on like this. I'm not frightening you off getting married, am I?

MONICA

You're giving me a clearer idea of the man I want to be with. It will be someone who can look at me naked and say, 'I don't care about the scars. I don't care what your body looks like now. As long as you're alive, that's what's most important to me,'

SUSIE

Michael just sighs and holds me.

MONICA

And you can tell.

[SUSIE nods]

SUSIE

But I'm not the same person that he married. *[Holding chest]* In so many ways. Suddenly there are things coming up between us... like the question of this chemotherapy treatment... Michael keeps saying he doesn't know what he'll do if something happened to me...

[MEI moves in]

MEI

But you're not thinking about that at all, are you!

SUSIE

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I have to do some shopping for the baby. Monica, will you come with me?

MONICA

For the baby? But—

MEI

Buying things for it won't guarantee it gets born, you know.

SUSIE

Mei, stop being so condescending!

MEI

I'm not being condescending.

SUSIE

Yes you are. You're being condescending and treating me as though I'm not capable of making decisions on my own. You, and Michael, and even my mother! That's right, I know you've been talking to my mother behind my back—

MEI

Susie, you're under a lot of stress right now, we're all concerned about you, that's all.

SUSIE

Mei, I have breast cancer, I'm not mentally retarded.

MEI

I know.

SUSIE

Just because you're a doctor, you come charging in, telling me what to do!

MEI

I am not speaking as your doctor!

SUSIE

Right now I don't want you as a doctor, but I need you as a friend, okay?

[They embrace, MEI feels something & springs back]

MEI

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Oh! I think—

SUSIE

That's a 'Hi'.

[*speaking to her abdomen*] It's Aunty Mei.

MEI

Hi.

SUSIE

I thought about it, Mei. I really did. But there's a living being in here, you know.
A child. A person.

SUSIE

We agreed on a delivery date and a regular program of checkups.
But while I was there, and they were showing me the baby's heart rate on the
monitor...

MEI

Suddenly the doctor in charge said, "your baby's heart is slowing down...
severely... "

MONICA

Mei started to tell the doctor, "Don't be silly", and then I saw her face freeze
up.

SUSIE

What's happening! Tell me what's happening!

MEI

Before we had time to panic there were about five other people in the room
trying to get Susie's baby's heart rate up again.

MONICA

I was never so scared in my life.

SUSIE

[*cries out*] What's happening? Tell me what's happening! Please don't let my
baby die—

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MEI

[*wailing simultaneously*] Aiyoh! What's happening! What's happening! What's happening!

MONICA

[*at the same time*] What's wrong! Oh Susie! What should we do? We shouldn't have let her eat prawns at lunch! Should we call Michael? She's not going to die, is she?

MRS LIM

[*Quite calmly*] The baby? How?

MEI

[*At the same time*] I never felt so scared before—I never felt so useless! If only I was a doctor! If only I was a gynaecologist! If only I had attended that course in hands-on miracle faith healing!

MONICA

I'm never going to have a baby. Never, never, never.

MEI

I kept thinking, 'I should have known! I should have known!' and I didn't even know what it was that I should have known or why I should have known it.

MRS LIM

The baby coming out soon. Must get ready.

[*each time MRS LIM speaks the others calm down*]

MONICA

The baby's all right, then?

MEI

They're going to induce it. It's all right. And it's about ready

MONICA

Susie?

SUSIE

I'm about ready too.

MEI

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They'll be bringing you in shortly... how are you feeling?

SUSIE

I suppose I'm as ready as I can be. All my baby clothes and baby things are at home—

MEI

Baby clothes aren't enough...

MONICA

Oh look what I got you.

SUSIE

A pacifier! How sweet! Monica, it means so much to me that you got something for my baby!

MEI

Pacifiers can become a bad habit. Here.

SUSIE

What's this?

MEI

Education insurance. You want your child to have a good education, don't you? Well

that costs a lot and it's going to cost even more in eighteen years time!

SUSIE

Oh, Mei. Mei, thank you!

[MRS LIM takes off or produces some piece of jewellery and hands it to SUSIE]

SUSIE

Oh, Ma. It's beautiful! But this isn't for a baby.

MRS LIM

It's for you. You will always be my baby.

SUSIE

[calling out in response] Yes, I'm ready.

[Then she looks at the people around her] I mean, we're ready.

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THE END

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