

c uterus uterus

AUTHOR Connie Boland

"I need more light down here!" The gynecologist hauls what appears to be a 1,000-watt lamp into position. Unnatural light reveals dimpled thighs before casting a harsh glare on my unshaved calves.

"That's better," she says. "Shimmy your butt this way a tiny bit, there you go. Slide your feet into the stirrups, perfect!"

Jesus Murphy. Is there anything worse?

Tissue paper folds into the sweet spot at the base of my spine. Huddled under the thin cover I rub my bare arms. Goose bumps look like a heat rash on the first day of summer. In the examination room, metal shelves are stocked with antiseptic, and surgical kits. I see protective equipment, and personal care supplies. The air smells like rubbing alcohol, hand sanitizer, and bleach.

I arrived at the hospital, as instructed. The Outpatients Department was a mass of complaining humanity. Perched on the corner of a metal chair bolted to the stained floor, I clutched my MCP card and a paper triangle snatched from the dispenser clinging to the dented wall. Number 57 in a

room ripe with unwashed bodies. A youngster with a slimy nose and puke-encrusted hands toddled my way. A man sitting six metres to my left sneezed violently. What should have been captured in the crook of his camouflage jacket spiralled into moist air. A teenager coughed energetically.

On the Woman's Health Unit, I see a nurse with blond highlights and a styled-up lanyard. She had pinned a thumb-size uterus next to a smiling vagina. Her ID badge dangled from a heart-shaped badge reel. "Put this on and meet me outside," she said. "No clothing from the waist down."

My fingers curl around a mucus-

coloured gown. Clean stains form a rainbow of bodily secretions embedded in opaque material barely the size of a dish towel. It smelled like urine. I ask about the gown. "Is it necessary for an ultrasound?"

"Hmm," the nurse murmured. "I have you down for a different procedure." The appointment was arranged months ago. I was distracted when my doctor's receptionist called. Caught up in the blurred reality of working from home and overseeing my grandchild's online education. I scribbled the date, time, and location on a calendar pinned with alphabet magnets to the refrigerator door. God damn short-term memory.



In the frigid bathroom, I shimmied out of my faded Levis. I stripped off the Hanky Spanky lace thong bought on sale at Walmart. The flimsy material slithered to the floor. I dug into my creased leather purse for a baggie of wet wipes that smelled like chubby babies. I stuffed my panties into the pocket of my jeans but kept on my wool socks. I arranged my winter boots neatly, under a table with tired legs.

The gynecologist explained the procedure, a routine test to extract rogue cells from a dormant uterus. "You will experience a bit of discomfort," she said. "But that shouldn't last long." Positivity posters are taped to the ceiling. God damn menopause.

The speculum feels like a long, thin icicle. God damn vaginal exams. "Is our patient ok up there?" The RN stands guard at my right shoulder. "We're doing just great, aren't we, my love?"

A Charlie Brown scrub cap appears between the yellow smiley faces knit into the heels of my socks. "Jen, come see this," the gynecologist says. "No, not there, stand here. Closer."

I feel a rush of warm air. Something slides further inside, up, and around my lady parts. A pause and then four eyes roll over my wrinkled knees.

"You can watch," the doctor says. "There's a screen over your left shoulder."

I tilt my head, adjust my glasses, and squint. The images are watery pink, and skim milk white.

"That's a lovely little polyp," the doctor says. "Let's nip it right off." A wire snare slithers toward a mushroom-like stalk. It lassoes the tip, which looks bumpy, like broccoli. I tug my mask over my bifocals, breathing deeply. The image disappears.

"Almost done. Hold still. It's going to pinch." The RN holds my hand. I feel her bones shift. She doesn't flinch.

The duck-bill-shaped device chews into my womb, ripping at cells, tearing them from the lining. I wiggle my toes and bite the inside of my cheek. My heels press into the stirrups. My mouth tastes like the scrambled eggs I had for breakfast. "Christ, that, hurts," I say through clenched teeth.

The doctor's navy scrub top fills the space between my legs. "All done," she says, patting a hairy calf. "Nothing to it."

In the bathroom, I clean myself tenderly. Outside the heavy door, health care workers strip a disposable sheet flecked with red from the examination table.

I retrace my steps, gliding around wheelchairs, IV poles, and bruised hands. Outside the hospital, the air is frosty. It washes away the smell of

cafeteria food, dead flowers, and cigarette smoke. My phone rings as I scrape snow from my car windshield. "It was fine," I say, trying to ignore ice pick pains. "Nothing to worry about."

My significant other asks about dinner. "Let's not have stir fry," I say. "I'm not keen on vegetables right now."

Connie Boland is a creative writer and adult education instructor in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador. New to menopause, she is trying to navigate the world of hot flashes and hormones. When Connie figures that out, she plans to write about it to help others.

Photograph from [Unsplash](#)