

Patio Furniture

2600 words

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Lisa was taking her usual Monday morning jog in her suburban tract neighborhood, but today, twenty minutes in, her breasts felt abnormally heavy.

Her first thought was is her period coming early. Though that almost never happened. Plus this business now, it seemed different . . . that they were engorging . . . and then backing off . . . and Gosh, if she didn't know better it felt like the damn things had a mind of their own.

She rounded the community tennis courts and was coming up on the pool, where she liked to swim laps in the afternoon. Her breasts had shrunk back down and hopefully that was that . . . but no, now they were definitely filling again, straining against her modest medium (34/b) sports bra. She had a terrifying thought: what if they *kept* increasing in size and then exploded, like those water balloons you fill up with the squirt guns at the county fair, until one pops and someone wins a prize.

Lisa cut the run short and went home. Her husband Chuck was in his downstairs office but you didn't want to involve him in this--and it *might* be nothing--and she headed up to the master bath and took a look in the mirror.

They were larger than normal at the moment, though only slightly. But this was too weird.

She took a shower and the TV in the bathroom had CNN, and when she got out, the host was telling you about a Senate filibuster . . . and the darn situation started amping up again.

After lunch Lisa made an appointment with the doctor. She still wasn't going to tell Chuck, but that night there was a baseball game on and she felt herself swelling and when Chuck asked for the changer he did a double-take and said, "Whoa, *Babe*. You didn't like go on the pill or something on me did you? Those beauties are looking ripe, I must say."

This is one reason she regretted marrying Chuck. He had his okay qualities, but when you stripped it away he had his head up his ass no different than back in his college frat house.

“Since you ask,” she said, “the answer’s no. But I do have a circumstance that’s concerning me a bit. Perhaps I’m retaining water.”

“So go in and find out,” Chuck said. “That’s why we got Kaiser. Though I wouldn’t lose sleep over it, honestly.”

He smiled and added something about the fallout from turning 30, how your body--and obviously glands now--can change, and not necessarily for the worse. Lisa decided if they had a backyard pool she’d push him out an upstairs window into it.

In the morning Chuck seemed more sympathetic and drove her to the doctor, and when she checked in they gave her a male doctor’s name she didn’t recognize, and she asked Chuck in that case to please come in with her.

The doctor had a very slight eastern European accent. “You’ve used the word ‘alarmed’ more than once,” he said, after examining things. “For *what* reason?”

“The situation’s been better today,” Lisa said. “There’s not as much . . . fluctuation. But even now--I mean I know you don’t know me, physically . . . previously . . .”

“I understand,” the doctor said. “Have you engaged in any new dietary practices? Medications, herbal remedies, unusual exercise routines. Experienced a recent injury--anything of that nature?”

“No. Not that I’m aware of.”

“Exercise can increase women’s boobs?” Chuck said. “I thought they refuted all that shit.”

“Yes, by itself unconfirmed,” the doctor said. “But in conjunction with other elements exercise may affect the hormonal index. How is your sex life, if I may ask? Any recent alterations or additions there?”

“Okay Bud, that’s enough,” Chuck said.

“*I beg your pardon?*” Lisa said to Chuck. “Doctor Wells, I truly apologize for that.”

“No offense taken,” the doctor said. “I’ll let you folks go. I’m going to look into it, whether anything appears in the anecdotal record, or otherwise.”

“And then what?” Chuck said.

“Then we’ll be in touch. Myself or a colleague. At this point your assessment of water retention is a valid parameter.”

Back in the car Chuck asked Lisa if she’d like to stop for a burger at In-n-Out and she said she wouldn’t mind, and they ate in silence, though there were a couple guys

in the next booth and one of them was kind of cute and Lisa felt her breasts swelling.

That night she called her sister Wanda.

Wanda listened without interrupting, took her time processing it and said, “Hate to say it Lee, and this sounds so silly. And insane. But could they be behaving like a man’s . . . you know . . .?”

“That’s unfortunately crossed my mind,” Lisa said. “And if the only time it happened was me admiring the guy in the hamburger place . . . then I don’t know . . . I might agree with you. But it’s been so goddamn random.”

“But has it really?” Wanda said. “I mean jogging, could you have noticed something intriguing and kinda like absorbed it subliminally? Or thought about some *one*? Fantasized? No idea, I’m just throwing it out there.”

“You’re saying . . . keeping it more real . . . maybe the baseball players in the uniforms? A stretch, but fine. But the TV newscaster, an older gentleman, I had a crush on him and didn’t know it?”

“*Alls* I’m saying, the recesses of the mind, we understand 1 percent of what’s going on in there. If that.”

“Yeah, well, I knew you’d help me.”

“Okay now let’s don’t be laying that sarcastic shit on me. What does Chuck say?”

“Oh he’s thrilled. He doesn’t give a flying fig what the reason may be.”

“Well have things, I don’t know, improved, bedroom-wise?”

“What are you, a doctor now?” Lisa said, and she hung up.

She fixed some milk and cookies and sat at the kitchen table.

She felt a little bad being hard on her sister. After all, she’d called *her*. And Wanda probably had some perspective. Wanda *had* been on the pill earlier in life, and then the reverse, they waited too long to have kids and had to go on the hormones. Then of course the breastfeeding and admittedly the massive boobs for a while.

But Gee, could any part of that have made sense? Lisa went on her phone and found a photo of her old high school boyfriend. He’d located her on Facebook a couple years ago and they messaged each other occasionally and of course she kept it quiet from Chuck. There he was, Tim, on vacation in Hawaii, getting ready

to go in or out of the ocean . . . and son of a bitch, her breasts were swelling rapidly.

Dr. Wells called back the next morning.

Lisa said, “I didn’t expect such quick turnaround, frankly. Now you have me worried.”

“Please don’t be,” the doctor said. “I wanted to update you on some data I came across.”

“Oh.”

“So, in 1992 in Virginia, in 1998 in New Hampshire, and once more in 2014 in Oregon, there were documented cases which preliminarily exhibit characteristics similar to those you describe.”

“Wow . . . What’d they do about it then? Or are you telling me . . . they just ran their course?”

“That’s unclear. I’m afraid the casework is open-ended. Additionally, a researcher in Wales described a possibly relevant cluster there as well, in the 1980’s. Do you have Welsh ancestry by chance?”

“Wait. You’re saying, *that* could be a factor? Wouldn’t you have, like hundreds of thousands of women in the same boat? . . . I do, fine, on my dad’s side.”

“Point well-taken. However, the three domestic-case patients break down a bit further.”

“Patients now?”

“Not necessarily. The generic term.”

“Break down a bit further, how?”

“That’s where it gets interesting. All three were determined to have had scarlet fever as children. All three women were also apparently ambidextrous. And did have at least some Welsh heritage.”

Lisa took a moment. “I’m those things too,” she said. “Holy Mackerel.”

“Okay wonderful then,” Dr. Wells said. “That’s an extraordinary confirmation actually.”

“Wonderful?”

“No, no, of course. Only that we may have tied in to a trail of concrete significance here.”

“*Un-real . . .* Allow me to . . . ask you this then. Even if these crazy factors did pan out . . . wouldn’t there still be dozens--hundreds?--of women affected? I mean I’m assuming scarlet fever is rare but not that rare, and plenty of people are good with both hands.”

“That’s where it becomes interesting on a secondary level. Possibly an immunological one . . . As I’m sure you know, certain root illnesses and diseases and afflictions remain dormant in the body, often forever.”

“Ooh boy . . . So what you’re slowly telling me--I think--is I’m one of the few?--the very few--who rattled the friggin *beast*?”

“I’d prefer to put it in different terms, but certainly that’s a distinct possibility.”

Lisa said, “I appreciate you following through. But being totally candid? It sounds like hogwash.”

“I’ll stay in touch,” the doctor said.

Lisa drove to Walmart. Pushing a cart up and down the aisles helped clear the cobwebs other times when there’d been crises. None of them like this though.

On the wall behind the home furnishings was the bank of TV’s all these places had, about 25 screens fired up with the sound muted.

A third of them had on a golf tournament, the backdrop making you think it was Florida. A third had an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. The final third had a commercial for the Lloyd Fuller Show.

The Lloyd Fuller Show was local. He was a guy with a bad hairpiece who had off-beat, radical-type guests. Lisa typically gave the show a look and then flipped channels.

But she remembered now . . . he had on a guest last week who talked about mind control and other mental

phenomena, and she'd stayed with it . . . and it was interesting, though obviously pretty ridiculous.

At least maybe.

When Lisa got home she went on the TV station's website and there was a link to a page for The Lloyd Fuller Show, but not much information. So she called the station.

"Let's see," the receptionist said. "I know the one you mean, I saw the tape. I go to my boyfriend later, let's try a little of that mental stuff, off the show. He goes, that's your department. What do you think he meant by that?"

Lisa said, "Are you for real?"

"I'm just playing with you. Here we are--Dieter Bruff, is the gentleman's name."

"Thank you. Do you know, is he local himself, or just stopped in town for the show?"

"Welp, let's see. It says here, his bio, he's with Stanton. You're familiar with that?"

"I think so. Up on the hill, off Waterworks Road."

"You got it. Stay safe."

Lisa hung up. Whatever. Stanton was one of those peculiar places you were aware of but didn't pay attention to. She took a look at their website. Founded

twenty years ago by a husband and wife. A two-year college, and accredited, which was surprising. Students could get an Associates degree in paranormal studies. Dieter Bruff was the department head.

Hmm. It was quarter to two, a Wednesday, school would be in session. It seemed reasonable to take a ride over there.

“Honey can you come with me?” she said to Chuck. “I may have a new lead into my, issue. Or it could be nothing. But there’s a college professor.”

“Lees,” Chuck said. “For crying out loud. What are you doing here?”

“Excuse me?”

“I mean go back to *work* why don’t you. Ever since you quit the bank you’ve been creating these projects. Rearranging shit. Like the patio furniture. Who does *that*? That’s my take, you want the truth.”

Lisa ran through other ways besides pushing him out a window that she could mess this guy up and get away with it.

She drove out to the college anyway, and there was a note on Professor Dieter Bruff’s door that he was out of town on a book tour and would be returning in two weeks.

Her breasts had swelled--God knows why--when she found the faculty building and approached his office. Now they reduced themselves.

She must have missed that part on the TV show, that he wrote a book. Didn't everyone these days?

Separately she wondered how a supposed professor could take time off, la-di-da, in the middle of a semester . . . but forget that.

She found a Starbucks and bought Dieter Bruff's book on Kindle and voraciously ran through it to see if anything could apply to her situation.

There wasn't a lot. There was too much fluff and it was poorly written. The takeaway was that *what the mind believes, the mind can achieve*. Whoopee.

At the end of the book was a list of recommended other materials. They were mostly self-help, how to overcome life's obstacles books--but one stood out called 'Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain'. That one was from the 1970's, it said, translated from Russian.

Lisa couldn't find it online and it was a long shot but why not try the library. The librarian pattered around on the computer with a furrowed brow, and then said to follow her, and the book was in a special reference room

the librarian opened with a key. “Please make yourself comfortable,” the woman said. “And of course, no eating or drinking in here.”

There were glass cases and there was an armchair and a footrest and Lisa sat there for an hour. The book took you places you didn’t expect. There was an experiment she wanted to try, where people were focused on objects and someone in another room was picking up what they were. When they stuck a barrier made of lead between the sender and receiver it stopped working.

She drove home. Okay maybe it was conceivable, that somehow she’d empowered herself to raise this *affliction*--as the doctor put it--from its dormant state.

If so, how would you reverse the bullshit? Not with the Dr. Wellses of the world, she didn't think. If anything, they wanted to guinea pig you with pharmaceuticals.

She wondered if you might actually have to go to Russia. It was silly, but she checked her passport to make sure it was still valid.

In the morning after breakfast the Lloyd Fuller Show came on. Today there was an ordinary

mainstream guest. The person was outlining safety-repair tips for the novice homeowner.

Lisa had an idea. Chuck would be fine with an experiment, where you sit him down in the other room and you instruct him to concentrate on your breast size, and you explain how it worked in Russia, and you give him five minutes and challenge him to increase them to mammoth proportions.

Then he comes in and checks how he did.

You might rig something up electrical, some loose wire type thing, that then shocks his ass as it's never been shocked before.

You'd have to be careful of course, to keep your own self out of it.

Lisa decided it couldn't be rocket science, and she didn't have anything else to do today, so might as well head to the hardware store and do a little research.