

"I've been feeling tired and run down," she said. She paused. He smiled her on.

"I thought it better to see you."

He nodded approval.

"Do you think might there be any cause? Is there anything you suspect? No?"

"There are some growing cysts in my right breast," she said and it surprised her that it came out in mere words.

She held his face in a scrutiny so passionate that it'd sift flickers into meanings. Nothing stirred there, neither eyes nor mouth, the hands played on with the biro. She saw seriousness, listening, readiness, understanding; but neither surprise nor alarm.

"Have you been aware of them for long?" he asked.

He did not even ask to see them yet. She pretended to count back.

"Last November," she diminished. "I felt as well as usual. Christmas was coming. There seemed so many things I had to do. It went on the long finger and slipped from day to day."

"Do not worry," he said. "We all put things on the long finger, foolish as it may be! Is there any pain?"

"No. Sometimes an awareness of something there, a discomfort, but not a pain."

"Can I see?" he asked at last.

She unbuttoned the blue coat or the costume and then the lace blouse that rose squarely to the throat in the V of the coat, unhooked her brassière. She let him guide her to the couch against the wall and lay down there.

There was the usual probing and asking of questions, "Here? There? Yes? Does it hurt?"

She dressed. They sat again. It was his responsibility to speak or stay silent.

"I don't think you have a thing to worry about but," and she knew the words that were coming, "from my examination I think it'd be better to send you for a hospital investigation, just to make certain."

"To hospital," she murmured in dejected acceptance.

"Were you ever there before?"

"Yes," she smiled. "For twenty years."

"You were a nurse before you married?" he started. "It was careless. I should have known. You should have told me."

John McGahern - The Barracks (1963)