

Your Box with the Family Jewels

Your small-framed Mexican body shook with excitement when you got a new job in the medical field. Your first day, on the way to work, is filled with anticipation—you cannot be late. Though your job position is “Surgical Room Witness” you have already been coached that for the first six weeks, all you are to do is stand on “the box,” observe the medical proceedings that transpire between the doctor and patient, touch nothing, and to wear the outfit provided for you. Simple.

It is not skilled labor, which you lament. Not because it would please you to know that you had been well-educated but simply because it is not a “well-paying job” even though it is a position serving El Doctor and the hospital—your job really pertains to lawsuit prevention.

As you arrive at work you recall that your first impulse was to question such a job description—it’s so nebulous, what is “the box,” why is it only a one foot cube and why was the interviewer so adamant about you only needing to maintain visual observation of the patient? But upon second thought, as you meet your new co-workers and are welcomed into the dressing room to put on your uniform, you flick your fore-finger against your thumb and middle finger, making an excited crisp snap, which indicates to those around you that you are thrilled to be employed and in an amazingly stable field as medicine no less.

Footsteps ring or shuffle in the sterile hallways of the hospital—you quickly observe that if the shoes ring, it’s a customer (no, patient, always patient, never customer)—if it’s a shuffle, it’s an employee with the right kind of shoe. This is central Mexico, Aguascalientes, the geographical center, and the dust from the desert mountains covers every visible surface there is.

You arrive, uncomfortably, two minutes early, at the appointed room, twitching at the tightness of your outfit. The door is slightly cracked but you will be told when to enter. Small-framed men, in similar but different clothes, run and scamper like perfectly trained gofers responding to El Doctor. And right then you see it.

“The box” is exactly and nothing more than what was described to you. It is one foot high one foot wide and one foot deep and you know instantly that only you could stand on that wooden pedestal—seeing that it is surrounded by cords, tables with shining instruments, light fixtures, and placed right at the foot of the bed—there is only enough room for one small-framed woman to stand there.

As the gurney wheels around—which transports a large male, either American or Canadian, by the lousy accent—a slight cough reminds you not to look the customer (no, patient) in the eyes—this makes them feel very uncomfortable. You remember wanting to ask why it would be uncomfortable to make eye contact. But now that you have your uniform on it makes sense: your eyes are the only visible piece of your human anatomy

that can be seen. The rest of you is covered in white starched cloth. You feel like a mummy, your hearing is muffled, and now El Doctor has signaled for your entrance.

A twinge of panic creates the kind of heat that makes more than your body burn with discomfort. You know why . . . it's because you have not been able to remember the cue word which will begin El Doctor's procedure. As you near "the box," something else begins to nag at your mind; it has to do with the patient. But first you must navigate your way successfully to "the box."

Contorting and balancing were not part of the job description—yet during that effort you glance at the one word descriptor of the operation about to be performed before you—being present at a vasectomy was also not covered in the interview. In fact, you realize that it had never entered your mind what kind of things you might be expected to view.

You duck three or four cords, turn, side-step the brilliantly sharp implements, and catch, out of the corner of your eye, what is to occupy your whole scope of vision, indeed, your whole purpose for being perched directly above, and only four feet away, from it.

You see it, or them, and instinctively wince as your body moves to look away—but they're almost glistening in the blinding flood lights. Plus, there is a giant North American laying in front of you. He is covered from top to bottom in layers of purified and sanitized white surgical linens, except for a one foot by one foot square, which is deliberately exposing clumps of recently shaved skin.

The awkwardness of your circumstances multiply when El Doctor calls for *el agua caliente y jabon* [hot water and soap]. To your surprise, after emptying the pitcher of water on the patient's nuptial equipment, El Doctor begins rigorously scrubbing each member of the patient's naked sexual region.

Illegally, you risk the slightest peek upward and note the growing tension on his face. Without the slightest bit of hesitancy, or what would seem to be due gentleness, El Doctor seems to be lost in thought—he's determined to get that area really clean. You wait in sweat for that cue-word you can't remember, baffled at how much hot water it took to get every single remnant and bubble of soap off of the patient's unit, which now appears sun-burned.

“Bueno, estamos listos jovenes? Señor, estamos listos?”

[translation: Okay kids, are we all ready? Sir, are we ready?"]

You want to think about how strange it is that nobody answered El Doctor with more than vertical nods. You want to think of fields of grass, and the blue sky, music, food, or something other than the full gravity of your situation. When El Doctor gives the cue word, which he is legally bound to pronounce, it will be your job to keep your eyes directly on the patient's exposed and nearly raw, freshly shorn tenders, which have

already been given very rough treatment. You begin to question whether your answer about how you handle viewing blood and dissections was really true.

The words sear into your brain, “It is your job to observe every interaction between El Doctor and the patient when he gives the cue.”

“The box” under your feet, and the box before you, are both making you feel unpleasant as you dwell on your new job, which is to be four feet from a man's shaved crotch, for what they told you could be twenty minutes. With a hard blink you think about getting paid to watch everything El Doctor and the other mummies have to do to get this gringo to fire blanks. Is it worth the money?

“Bueno chicos – que observan ... *Voy a tocar!”

[translation: Okay kids, please observe . . . I’m going to touch him!

There it is . . . the cue: Voy a tocar! And he says it again:

“Ya – Voy a tocar.”

[translation: Here we go, I’m going to touch him.”]

It occurs to you that the patient had already been extensively touched—to the point of absurdity, actually—and in fact, the way El Doctor said it begins to crack a smile on your face. All at once you feel observed.

Would the others in the room notice your smile—and if so, how would they interpret it? Now you totally understand why making eye contact could be really bad, even do permanent emotional damage. If you were to laugh, at this point in the procedure, it could mean anything.

And you thought you were uncomfortable before.

Still, you think, really? “Voy a tocar?” you repeat to yourself. As you grit your teeth the phrase lodges in your mind. It does not help that you notice, unfortunately, the Yankee's face is not covered. He is smiling too as his eyes scan the room with keen quick movements.

You forget yourself as you notice the patient's pleading eyes. You assume he is searching the room for someone who will agree with him that, at that point, the poor patient had been more thoroughly touched than he had been warned of—certainly more thoroughly scoured than ever before—and El Doctor had not even sliced him yet.

Twenty minutes of torturous gentle movements, as three pairs of hands played the gringo's manhood like a joystick, make you wonder if you'll be the same woman after this experience. El Doctor's words could not have been worse.

“Bueno Señor, estamos muy bien aqui. Estas bien? Okay? Entonces ahora cambiamos al otro lado. Cierta gente?”

[translation: That's it, Sir, we're all good here. Are you doing good? All Okay? So then let's move to the other side, right people?]

It was your turn, then, to search the room for someone to commiserate with. Was this a joke? Could El Doctor be serious, the operation was only half complete? Your neck burned with the heat of your own breath as sweat beads formed and started to journey. You panic in the confusion, as the medical tribe members flurry into a dance of ritualistic prefabricated circles around the human science project who had no choice but to continue to bare his now semi-functional equipment, which you were certain, by the look in his eyes, had never been in the open air so long.

But you were wrong, Sweetheart. You were wrong to think that was the first pubic invasion I had undergone . . . but nevertheless, when you looked at me, after all that “tocar business” all that washing, and scrubbing, spraying, handling, sticking, and cutting; when El Doctor announced that all that “touching” was only half over, you and I both wanted to call it off and end the misery.

I can only imagine that you were older than sixteen, for your eyes seemed very youthful. Poor girl, there I was in Aguascalientes, Mexico, to have a nice quiet vasectomy, an anonymous stranger invisible and temporary. And there you were, at the foot of my bed, on “the box,” only able to identify me by my face and my whole package, making me feel completely known and recognized every time our eyes met.

Indelible, like my other scars south of the border, the memory of getting a vasectomy in Mexico was comical.

What could we do but laugh—two strangers, trapped in an awkward situation? You on your box and me with the family jewels hanging out like we were long time nudist colony veterans.

And you kept looking up at me, after that halfway point, as if to say, “Hang in there, random abused gringo.” And I too kept looking at you, as if to say, “Sorry about this, random innocent small-framed Mexican girl, please don't introduce yourself on the street if our paths should cross.”

by rod sachs
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