The Procedure

or

How I Came to See the Vas Deferens Between Dr. Blaire and Me

Dr. Blaire had suggested that I have the procedure done at his office. “No need to pay hospital fees. It’s a pretty simple procedure.” He had hesitated for just a beat, then, flashing a wry smile, had added, “and no one has ever died from it. We won’t need an anesthesiologist either. We’ll just give you a local.” For a moment, I entertained the image of being given a “local”, then shook it off with a barely perceptible shudder.

I had no difficulty finding his recently relocated office, between Pomona and Claremont. I had become pretty familiar with the area since moving my family to Southern California two years before. By the time the receptionist led me into the small examining room, I had finished the inevitable patient paperwork, read two issues of Newsweek, and had searched halfway through the July ’71 issue of Ranger Rick, for, gee-whiz factoids, about nature, to spice up my biology lectures at La Verne College.

For another fifteen minutes, after the nurse had taken my temperature and blood pressure, I waited in my underwear and socks in the chilly examining room, pondering the role of humility in patient compliance. Finally, Dr. Blaire appeared wearing a stereotypical white coat and stethoscope and sporting a red bow tie. He shook my hand, and asked if I was ready. I said I was.

“That’s good.” Looking around the room, he continued, “I apologize for not being completely set up yet. We will have to improvise a little for your surgery.”
“Oh, okay...” I was not at all sure it was okay, but here I was, half-naked, and no place else to go.

“Come with me.” I followed him into another room, carrying my clothes. There was a small table, not exactly an examining table and not a gurney, but at least it had padding and a sheet and it looked sturdy enough. The room smelled of new paint, rather than the clinical odor I had expected. There were the usual white cupboards and drawers arrayed above and below shiny black counter tops. In the corner, a tall, rather dilapidated gooseneck lamp stood leaning precariously away from a round metal stool on wheels.

“Make yourself comfortable on the table here while I get some things.” He returned with a sheet and pillow under one arm and a can of shaving cream in his hand. “Here’s a pillow for you. Take off your underwear and relax.” Once I had settled on the table beneath the sheet, he explained. “After I prep you, I’ll give you the local, then make a small incision. I’ll reach in and hook a loop of the vas deferens, the sperm duct, and draw it out through the incision. I’ll remove a ten millimeter piece from it and then fold and tie the two ends back on themselves, like so.” He crimped one of the rubber hoses on his stethoscope to demonstrate folding and tying. “That will ensure that they don’t find each other and grow back together.”

During his description, I was propped up on my elbows listening closely and projecting, onto my body, the images that his words were conjuring in my mind. To create the images, I drew from my experiences teaching anatomy. Although I hadn’t worked on human cadavers, I had dissected representatives of just about every other taxonomic group. As I listened, my curiosity about the procedure overcame my innate
fear of seeing the protective skin boundary of my body breached by a scalpel and, almost before I realized it, I had said, “I’d like to watch, if I could.”

He answered, without hesitation, “Oh, certainly. I’ll get you another pillow, so you can see better. In fact, you can help with the lamp.”

The procedure went pretty much as he had described it. I watched each step as well as I could, with my head propped up on the two pillows and my hand steadying the wobbly lamp—first on the right side of the table then on the left. The pre-operative prep involved aerosol lather and a safety razor and my feelings ranged between embarrassment and amusement, as I watched Dr. Blaire gingerly administer my first and last genital haircut and a shave. He did an admirable job, considering the landscape, rife with potential for misinterpretation and innuendo, that he navigated. I would probably have been less amused if he had been using a straight-edged razor.

Although my insurance did not pay for “elective surgery”, such as, vasectomy, I considered the cost to have been a reasonable tuition fee for a novel and serendipitous educational experience. And, as a bonus, Dr. Blaire, very kindly, agreed to provide me with a small specimen bottle and some formaldehyde, so I could add the two, 10 millimeter pieces of *vas deferens* to the Biology Department’s specimen collection.

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