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“Stella, Nurse Practitioner”, by Berta Freistadt

**Stella, Nurse Practitioner**

The first day, the day of the mammogram  
she wore stones that glittered in the dirty light  
that swung and flipped about her waist.

We all watch her, the dainty steps  
her swishing hips. All try to catch her eye  
her tender smile, be noticed by the queen.

The second day, the day the radiographer  
was there she wore a string  
of pastel flowers like sweets.  
Slim as a poplar, moving like a nun  
among the mad. *How are you?* she says  
remembering us as if she cares.

Then for the day they cut out all those  
little samples with a gun that went  
‘bang-bang’, she wore the pearls  
pink and white, the ones her mother  
gave her when she had her little girl.

But in the office, where Al-Azawi rules  
at last she’s just the nurse, sheltering in the shade  
of that great baobab, tree of life. Superfluous  
as his cool fingers sweep and press.  
*Interesting, suspicious.*

The diagnosis at last confirmed,  
just her eyes upon me hold me up  
her hand soothing, keeps me sane.

**Berta Freistadt**

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