

by Parneshia Jones

Bra Shopping with Mother

Saturday afternoon, Marshall Fields, 2nd floor, women's lingerie please.

At sixteen I am a jeans and t-shirt wearing tomboy who can think of a few million more places to be instead of in the department store with my mother bra shopping.

Still growing accustomed to these two new welts lashed on to me by puberty, getting bigger by the moment, my mother looks at me and says:
While we're here, we'll get some new (larger) shirts for you too.
I resent her for taking me away from baseball fields, horse play, and riding my bike.

We enter into no man's, and I mean no man in sight land where women fuss and shop all day for undergarments; the lingerie department is a world of frilly lace, night gowns, grandma panties, and support everything.

Mama takes me over to a wall covered with hundreds of white bras, some with lace and little frills or doilies like party favors, as if undergarments were a cause for celebration.

A few have these dainty ditsy bows in the middle.
That's a nice accent don't you think? Mama would say. Isn't that cute?
Like this miniature bow in the middle will take some of the attention away from what is really going on.

When Mama and I go brassiere shopping it never fails:
a short woman with an accent and glasses
attached to a chain around her neck who cares
way too much about undergarments comes up to us.
May I help you, dearies?

The bra woman assists my mother in finding the perfect bra to, as my mother put it, hold me in the proper way. No bouncing please.

Working as a team plotting to ruin my entire day with the bra fitting marathon, they conspire up about ten bras in each hand which equal forty. Who's making all these bras I want to ask.

What size is she? The bra woman asks.
You want something that will support them honey, looking at me with a wink.
My mother looks straight at my chest. Oh she's good size. She's out of that training bra phase. I want her to have something that will hold them up proper.

Them, them, them they say.
Like they're two midgets I keep strapped to my chest.
The whole time I stand there while these two women, one my own kin, discuss the maintenance and storage of my two dependents.

The worst is yet to come, the dressing room.
I hate that damn dressing room, the mirrors waiting to laugh at me, women running in and out half-naked with things showing that I didn't even see on my own body.

I stand there half-naked and pissed. Mama on one side, the bra woman on the other, I feel like a rag doll under interrogation as they begin fixing straps, poking me, raising me up, snapping the back, underwire digging my breasts a grave.

The bras clamp down onto me, shaping my breasts out to pristine bullets, with no movement, no pulse, no life, just sitting fix up like my mother wanted real proper.

I will never forgive my mother for this, I keep thinking to myself.
Looking blank face at my reflection I start thinking about how my brothers never have to shop for undergarments; why couldn't I have been born a boy?
I hate undergarments.

Mama looks at my face. Don't you like any of them?
No, I say. Mama I hate this, please can we go?
Then she goes into her lecture on becoming a woman and being responsible for woman upkeep.

After we are halfway through the inventory
Mama looks at me wasting away in a sea of bras and takes pity on me.
All right, I think we have enough to last you for a while. Let's check out.

I don't get happy too quick 'cause I know that bra woman still lurks about and if she senses my excitement that we are leaving she will come with more white bras.

We make our way to the check out counter
and the bra woman rings us up.
Oh honey you picked out some beautiful bras, she says.
Just remember hand wash. How about bury, I want to ask.

She and my mother talk about how they are just right and will do the trick for me with no bouncing at all.
My mother thanks her for torturing me and signals me to thank her as well. I thank her all right, but I also add her to my
secret hit list
of people who have made my life miserable in some way.

We walk out of the department as if walking out of hell.
My mother turns and looks at me. Now really, was that so bad?