

Exchange

*'You women are lucky,' he says
He's been spending the summer building
a machine to monitor radium implants.
The hospital hired him because an
engineering student for four months is
cheaper than a ready-made machine.*

*'It's so easy to cure cancers of the
cervix, uterus and breast.' With his
machine.*

*First time I've ever heard him say
breast instead of boob: he's becoming
quite scientific. Talk of wombs scares
him. Uterus he can manage.*

*Because he knows his machines well,
the tubes and wiring, how to cancel one
death with another, cancer with cobalt.*

*He doesn't worry that no grass will
grow around his section of the hospital.*

*'Yes,' I tell him. 'I hear testicles and
prostates come out easily too.' Aiming to
deflate.*

*Emotional. He keeps smiling,
knowing I can't easily part the essential
from the inessential
won't even have my ears pierced.*

*Lucky to be a woman. We disassemble
so easily.*

Merle Wallis Bolick