

Tassie awakening

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Her friends posed for selfies in front of their favourite vulvas. There were the usual antics MONA expected from a group of adolescents; some pointed, one pretended to lick, one licked a finger and positioned it as if to stick it in. "I'll make her mona".

Someone laughed. She looked around, no one cool was laughing so she stayed mute. She took a few photos of her friends trying not to look too interested in the vulvas. She glanced sideways, caught by their imperfection, not listening as someone droned on about the inspiration for the installation.

One vulva was pointed out with distorted lips and poor symmetry.

"I'd kill myself if I looked like that." "At least they don't have to stare at it in the mirror everyday like your ugly face".

Vulva, clitoris, vagina, words kept circling in her head. What was normal what was abnormal? Was she normal? The guide made a joke, others laughed. She laughed, slightly miscued.

She moved to the end of the row, positioning herself so she could maybe steal another glance as they were led into the next room. She was shoved. Her head hit the wall. Her hands flew in front of her. She saw something drop and her hands opened and closed around it. Her instincts told her it was a camera, the rest of her not registering anything except the urge to save herself from being hurt further and to stop whatever it was from dropping to the floor. She felt something smooth crack in her hands and under the cover of her school scarf she placed whatever it was into her blazer pockets.

She turned, a little stunned. The others had moved on, and not wanting to call attention to herself she followed. Don't make a scene. Don't make them see that shove made your head spin.

The room with the stomach machine was vile. It smelled.

Fart jokes erupted. "That you Fred!" "Excuse me". Supervisors exchanged weary looks. They'd heard it all before. Having a group come through that didn't comment, now that would be novel.

Outstanding short story writing competition 2016 / First prize winner

In her pockets she felt the smoothness the bumps and dips, the sharp edge where the split had occurred. She should tell someone that she had a stolen vulva in her pocket. Well not stolen. Not yet. She just needed to tell someone. But it was in two parts. It wasn't her fault. They would see that wouldn't they?

She couldn't go back to school and have everyone look at her. "Stolen vulva girl". She'd spent a lifetime wanting but not wanting attention. She couldn't do it.

She needed to get to a bathroom. There'd be somewhere she could hide it. She just needed a moment and it would be fine. Breathe. Look normal. How much longer?

Bathroom break, at last, long queue, look casual.

Finally. Close the door slowly, slide the lock. OK . Done.

Shit! No smooth surface, round toilet roll holder, no shelf. She finally took them out and looked at the two parts, placed them together. Shit. Shit. Flush them. No too big. Wrap them in toilet paper and flush them. What if they got stuck, the toilet overflowed?

Breathe. OK . Outside then. She put the two halves back in her pocket, flushed and walked out. Shit. No paper towel; just dryers. Where to put them?

She was out. Back in the main room. Tour finished.

They were allowed a moment in the shop. Maybe she could put them behind this sign? In the book about MONA? Vulva in a cup?

Backpacks collected. Each part slipped into a pocket.

"Excuse me can I see what you have in your bag?"

This was it then. But they weren't looking at her.

The ferry queue was long. Her friends seemed to be avoiding her. Was she giving off a weird vulva vibe. Was she cursed for having stolen it?

In her home, her bedroom, in her hands, the two parts gently being restored to their perfection. It was beautiful, the lips may be long, and the symmetry off but it was still perfect. She loved vulvas. Not just this one. In a moment a different life opened up and then closed quickly again. Acknowledged but not yet ready to be studied fully.

She'd stolen someone's vulva. And it was beautiful.