

Bag

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The Crohn's disease had been getting slowly worse and none of the medications I was on were working. By the time I was set to have the operation the inflammation had eaten away a lot of my sphincter muscle and I had become almost incontinent. The doctor told me there was no choice but to get a stoma put in and in early January I went in for surgery.

I cried a bit in the hospital room. The nurse came in and asked if I was all right. I told her I was and she gave me some antiseptic to rub over my stomach in preparation for the operation. She then handed me a form to fill out and left me alone. When she was gone I picked up the phone and called my parents. I'd asked them not to visit me while I was in hospital. My mother had insisted I call, however, and tell her when I was going into surgery.

We spoke for a short while and she sounded slightly choked up. I realised that I was probably being cold. I apologised to her, but still insisted that nobody come visit.

She said she loved me and I said the same to her and hung up the phone. I looked at the form the nurse had left me. One of the sections asked me to write down what operation I was having. I filled it in with a small pencil I had on my bedside table. When the nurse came back to collect the form she told me I had spelt 'ileostomy' wrong.

While I was under they made an incision just above my pelvis and brought out a piece of my gut, four centimeters of my small intestine that was to be my new arse.

When I woke up the colostomy bag was fitted and the morphine going. In my doped up state I touched the stoma. I could feel the peristalsis of my protruding bowel through the thin material of the colostomy bag. I kept my hand there until the nurse came over to check my blood pressure.

They took me back to my room and, still slightly out of it, I asked the nurse if I could call my parents. The phone was on my bedside table; she put the receiver in my hand and told me to dial zero to get an outside line. My mother answered, I don't remember what I said to her.

The stomal nurse visited me each day I was in hospital to see how I was healing. She showed me how to empty the bag. The stoma was still inflamed as it was so soon after the operation and my bowel was not yet properly digesting food. Mostly I would empty blood and fluid into the toilet.

In the middle of the night the bag would often leak and I would wake up with stained sheets. They still had me hooked to an IV and I was very low of energy. On the few times it happened I just lay there without calling the nurse.

Once they took away the morphine my thoughts were clearer and I felt the need to move around more. I got out of bed each day and made laps around the hallway. The stoma began to have regular output and I was soon digesting food properly. By my eighth day in hospital I was ready to go home.

I stayed with my parents for two weeks while I recovered. My health improved rapidly. I put on a lot of weight and found that I had much more energy than I did before the operation. I wanted to start life again and after about a month at home I moved into a share house with two girls, Linda and Abeille. They were very sweet and on my first weekend we had a tequila party. Because of the operation my body no longer absorbed fluid properly and I was afraid if I drank too much I would

get dehydrated. I stayed home when they all headed to a bar on Brunswick St. I took one of the left over painkillers to help me sleep.

I started university again in March. The weather was still warm. Soon after classes began I started to feel very lonely and horny. There were so many good looking girls and I had no idea how I was going to be able to pull any of them with a colostomy bag. I was scared I would miss out on the best part of being young, sleeping around.

The stomal nurse gave me a booklet called 'What about sex?' which contained advice about relationships from other people with stomas. One lady said it took her a year to start having sex again, another said she named her stoma 'spouty'. I stopped reading when I saw that people with stomas called themselves 'ostomates'.

I tried re-sparking the romance with the girl I lost my virginity to. I felt comfortable with the idea of being with someone that I had had sex with before the operation. I liked that she had seen I was born normal and it was the doctors who had made me deformed.

It turned out she had met someone. I kept looking, hoping to find someone new.

I met Jesse around June.

She was a literature student and loved the fact that I was a writer. I had had one piece published in a small literary magazine and she thought it was simply remarkable. She wanted to know all the details. What it's like to work your piece over with an editor. What it's like to tell your friends. What it's like to see your name in print. I told her that it was all pretty awesome.

I signed a copy of the magazine for her. It was the first time I'd ever signed anything and I practiced a few times on a scrap piece of paper. She pocketed the scrap

paper and said that one day it would be worth millions. I gave her a story I was working on to see what she thought.

I worked hard to conceal the bag from Jesse. I always wore baggy jumpers and shirts which were three sizes too big. Sometimes the stoma would make noise as it passed gas and I'm sure Jesse heard it happen a few times. There was really nothing I could do to muffle the sound.

I told her once about my Jewish friends. I said that many of them were getting married at my age. I explained how someone in the community would set them up and then they'd date for a couple of weeks, if they liked each other they'd marry soon after. Jesse said she didn't think this was such a bad system. It's hard enough to meet someone to go on dates with and if you both know what you want, what's the point in fucking around.

One Friday night we went to Open Studio in Northcote. There was a gypsy grunge band playing and after eating a couple of crepes we went to dance. The band was pretty fast and crazy and we stamped our feet on the ground and tried to keep up with the drummer.

She was wearing a cream coloured dress, with a generous amount of cleavage showing. The dress stopped just above her knees and when she danced it swished up and went a nice bit higher. I didn't want to kiss her on the dance floor in case she pulled my body into hers and made our bellies touch.

She was downing a lot of mulled wine and I knew I couldn't keep up with her. I was scared that at the end of the night I'd be in a situation where she'd be plastered and I'd be sober and I'd be forced to act chivalrous and end up not getting laid. We stopped dancing for a bit and after another mulled wine she told me she

needed a smoke.

When we got outside I led her to the far corner of the courtyard where there were a couple of garden chairs. It was right next to the toilet. Someone was taking a piss and I waited for them to finish and then for the sound of the flush to fade away before I took Jesse's hand.

She smiled and we started kissing. I asked her if she wanted to head back to mine. She said yes. I excused myself and went to the toilet to empty the colostomy bag. She stayed in the courtyard and smoked a cigarette.

None of my housemates were home when we arrived back at the house. I took Jesse up to my bedroom. I'd cleaned my room in anticipation of her coming over, but to seem like this was the norm I apologised about the mess.

She sat down on my bed and I asked her if she wanted music. She said she didn't care. I put on some Dave Matthews and sat down next to her. I felt the bag through my shirt to see how full it was. If we were going to have sex I would need to empty it.

I stalled for a little while, asking her if she liked the music, if she wanted some wine, if she was tired. She said she was fine and started kissing me on the neck and unbuttoning my shirt. I decided to let her make the discovery on her own. She worked her way down to my pelvis and stopped when she saw the bag.

I asked her if she knew what it was. She said she didn't. I felt like I'd deceived her by pretending to be normal.. I explained about the difficulty with my large bowel and sphincter and how the stoma was created so as to allow food to be diverted from the problem area. She asked me if I would need to have the stoma for the rest of my life. I told her yes and she didn't say anything in reply. I noticed her swallow.

I had no idea if I was going to get lucky or not. I decided to just keep going and see what she did. I kissed her again and we started making out. I began to take off her clothes. She let me get her down to her bra, but stopped me there. We lay in bed next to each other and said very little. We talked a bit about the band we'd seen and about other jazz bars in Melbourne. We both agreed that Open Studio was our favourite.

After a while she said that she was going to head home. She didn't give a reason and I didn't press for one.

I wasn't tired so I went downstairs to watch television. My housemates came home drunk. They opened a bottle of wine and I said I didn't want any. They continued to persist, waving the open bottle seductively. I explained to them that I couldn't drink and told them about the bag. Even though they were drunk they showed understanding and we all decided to get stoned instead of having wine.

I told them about Jesse.

Abeille said that some girls are just bitches. I told her that I didn't think it would have happened in any case. I also said that I wasn't sure I would see her again even if she were keen.

Linda started a joint and we passed it around. Very soon I was stoned. As the girls and I talked I felt my phone vibrate. It was a text message from Jesse. She said that she forgot to tell me she had read over my story and that she really liked it. I couldn't think of what to write, so I locked the phone and put it back in my pocket. I hadn't eaten much that night and the stoma began to excrete a large amount of fluid. It was making quite a lot of noise. The girls didn't say anything, I figured they were just being polite.

Linda offered me the joint and I declined. I said goodnight, headed to the toilet, emptied the bag and went to bed.