

**Gaynor Jones**

**The Thing Between Your Legs**

Mother always told us to refer to that place as the thing between your legs. We were never to say vagina in front of Father, or our one lone brother. Mother kept her legs crossed – always at the ankle, never at the knee. But there were six of us, plus the dead baby, so we knew she had opened them up plenty.

Mother told us,

‘When you are married, you may call it your pleasure.’

Though one evening when we’d conspired to serve her double measures of sweet port and lemon, she cackled and told us,

‘Though it remains to be seen whether the name will fit the man.’

We gathered in our bed-crammed room with a worn copy of *Forever* and snorted at the penis named Ralph. We took turns naming our own parts – Beryl, Agnes...whatever gave us the biggest laugh. Then we’d periodically ask Mother how her friend Beryl was and watch confusion ripple across her face as she repeated the name, trying to put her finger on who we could be talking about.

We took tampons out of packets, devoured the instructions then wondered about our collective hymen. Whenever our lone brother had a friend round we would dare each other to venture into the room, whoever said ‘Hi, men’ without laughing won the biggest cocoa that night.

In our science books we labelled vulva, ovaries and labia as we watched the boys blush over the bunsen burners, for once keeping their vulgar desk carvings to themselves. But the boys forgot - as boys can forget - to be coy, and soon they told us,

'Close your legs, you stink of fish'

and laughed even as they collected their detention slips. We smelled our tuna sandwiches in the lunch hall and shook our heads.

We never thought to touch the place between our legs. But in the months after Shauna shaved her head and wore dungarees to the sixth form disco we learned a lot. She told us we should feel wet, or else we should say no, keep our legs closed, but that when we met the right person, when we opened our legs in the right way, it was glorious.

'And the taste', she said, 'the taste.'

We didn't know it would have a taste.

We chose the smallest teaspoons, the ones with a chipped picture of Charles and Diana on and chased each other, daring but not quite daring to do it. Mother came in with the noise and we pretended we were playing the spoons on our bare knees like a couple of old time cartoon characters. Mother only shook her head and left us to it.

On the day that Mother found Shauna's box of things, they squared up to each other in the living room while we watched between the bannisters. They yelled in hushed tones, lest Father should hear, about things we didn't understand - dental dams and mouthwash. We thought perhaps Shauna was getting new teeth done.

'I will have to wait a long time to be a grandmother then,' our mother wailed, and then we understood.

But she didn't have to wait long at all. Not with five daughters in a quiet town.

Over the years, four of us gave birth, some through our stomachs, some through the thing between our legs.

When it was my turn, I asked for a mirror and watched as a bloody and wrinkled walnut appeared from inside me, sliding out into the world. I asked them not to let me know, I wanted to see for myself. I gently parted her knees as she wailed at my chest and I saw it and I held her



close. I put her legs back together and marvelled and despaired at everything she had yet to come.