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Bubble Bath

by Ben Gamble

The most important rule of a bubble bath: if you can see the blood, you need more bubbles.

If you're mute, standing in the shower while you wash off might make you feel a little empty, so you take baths, because no one sings in the bathtub. That's just weird. And if you can see blood in the water... then more bubbles.

...She needed more bubbles. It wasn't her blood. Was it her blood? Had she checked to see? She remembered somewhere between the running and the stopping, she found a quiet place and padded herself down. Entry wounds, exit wounds, were her shoelaces still tied: the crucial things. She had checked and she was okay. Wasn't she? She might have imagined that.

She had forgotten something, that much she knew. She had to have forgotten something. That was how these things go. You forget something that the sniffer dogs and the uniforms with maglites don't. She stared at the opaque water. The bottle said *White Vanilla* and the other said *Lilac Bliss* and the third one said *Honeysuckle Kiss*. When you bought bleach and lime alone, you got funny looks, but if you buy them with bubble bath mixes, then you're just doing spring

cleaning.

There might have been sirens outside. Both kinds, the blue-light shrieking kinds and the kinds that waited at the edge of the water and pulled you right on under. If there were any in the bathtub with her, the rushing water was shutting them up. Or maybe they just really liked ad-hoc bath mixes. *If this line of work does not wind up being profitable, I should look into bubble baths.*

There was steam rolling off the water and the faucet was going to break if she twisted it any further but it wasn't really her fault she was still cold, and hot underneath the chilly goosebumps skin, and then cold again beneath that. She moved her leg, a bruised-on-the-shin, unshaved-because-there-were-really-bigger-issues-at-the-moment pale lithe thing that, years ago, could pull a mean pirouette, and more recently, was not half bad at scrambling on top of rooftops and scampering down back alleys. She moved her leg and parted the bubbles for a minute like Moses parted the Red Sea, except the Egyptians stopped following Moses, and the Red Sea didn't smell half as good. The water was free of bubbles for a minute and she saw blood swirling around the water. Water and blood mixed turns sorta pink. Brains were kinda pink, too. If you mixed water and brains and blood, did they smell as good as all these bubble bath mixes? They did not. That's why they sell bubble bath mixes, you

know.

She looked away from the bloodwater. The rest of her bathroom was arguably more unnerving. There was the cracked mirror – which, on its own, didn't really bode well, but it reminded her she hadn't cleaned it in a while. It was minor, but it was another thing, you know. She was okay with the crack in the mirror itself. If you positioned yourself just right in front of it, it could hide scars, and a mirror that hides the parts of you that you don't like is really a rather fine mirror.

What do Moses and that mirror have in common? Denial.

What do the bubble bath mixes and the girl have in common? They're both mixed up in some bad stuff.

To say the counter was messy was to say that Carthage had a pinch of salt, though she supposed the two were equally peaceful. The toilet seat was up. She had put it up before she left. She lived alone and was not expecting guests (well, she was expecting guests who knock on doors with warrants but not guests of the male variety), but she was expecting to throw up quite a bit, and that was just a nice way to streamline the process. Like the past her was reaching into the future and holding her hair back as she dry heaved because she'd been too nervous to eat anything all day.

Hair. Hair. That was something she'd forgotten. Could hair slip through

a hair cap under a ski mask? Could it, did it? Or, maybe, would it?

If you ignored that catastrophe, there was the duffel bag lying next to the bathtub. For a moment, she was a gypsy woman cradling a crystal ball, shuffling Tarot beneath the bubbles, and she saw lots of duffel bags, lots of lying, and lots of bathtubs in her future. The mist in the crystal balls was sorta pink. It did not smell good, and she mixed three of them together to get the truth.

The duffel bag was black, which did not provoke suspicion at the checkout line, because every duffel bag is black, and if your duffel bag is not black it is not a duffel bag. If a bath does not have bubbles, it is still a bath, but it is a waste of water. She stared at the bag. It was zipped up really tight, because things—things full of probable cause and jacketed bullets—fall out of duffel bags, and those, like hair, are better kept zipped up nice and tight. She reached an arm out of the bathtub, looking like the Leviathan trying to ruin some fisherman's day, and pulled the bag over close to her. The water dropped and fell on the bag, flowering up and darkening it in a few places.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. Now she couldn't use the bag again because it would smell like *White Vanilla* and *Lilac Bliss* and *Honeysuckle Kiss* and guilt. Also, probably some blood. Not hers.

Inside the duffel bag there was

a rifle which was missing exactly two bullets from its five-round magazine. It was a magazine and not a clip and it was something she knew from many late nights researching and then memorizing because when you can't sleep you might as well try and memorize something. Inside the duffel bag there was also a suppressor for the rifle. It was a suppressor and not a silencer and it was disappointing because she would've liked a gun as quiet as she was. Like a sister that was really violent, and moody, and sometimes, if you flipped her switch, killed people. Like most sisters. Also inside the duffel bag there was a ski mask and a hair net. There was also a jumpsuit—and honey, if you thought that bathtub had blood, you should see the inside of that bag. Also, there was some water, but that was mostly from when her hand grabbed it just now.

She pulled her hand back in and sunk down below the water, feeling rather childish folding her legs up against the side of the tub to get her face way down under. She tried not to think about the blood in the water and tried to think about rubbing her face mask off. Why do you put on a face mask in the tub? Because if the rest of you is going to be underwater, and you're not going to move your face in the tub singing like you would in the shower (because it's weird), you might as well smear some guacamole-looking,

supposedly-helpful product all over it to keep your face from feeling colder than the rest of you.

She came up out of the water a product of the world's sweetest-smelling self-baptism. That was an okay thing in her book. She wiped away the rest of the gunk on her face with fingers that had shriveled up under the water and vaguely contemplated things like burning fingerprints off with acid or getting more bubble bath mix. There's actually a surprising amount of overlap between the two.

She sat half-above the water just thinking about things. Primarily, contradictions. She was sitting in a tub full, yet she needed a drink. She had enough scents mixing above the foamy water to kill an asthmatic, but she needed a smoke. She had been marinating in soap for two hours and she was not clean. She could not see through the face of the water but she was pretty confident there was nothing below the surface anyways. Nothing at all.