

She's said no. He'll be slightly disappointed, she thinks, but not hugely. He's not the kind of man to feel anything hugely. He'll shrug his shoulders and think about her for a few seconds. Sigh, because that's another day or two now before he gets to see her in that dress again. But then the loud colours on the television will burn through her dress and she'll evaporate into the air, and he'll watch the football. And forget they were ever supposed to meet.

Meanwhile, she's taken that dress off. She smiles to herself, slightly, because he would so want to be here. It drips off her like icing, bunching around her feet. She steps out of it. Normally, she would pick it straight up and put it on a hanger; she cleans and tidies the way a firefighter puts out fires; quickly, efficiently, immediately; with a sense of urgency and danger. She worries that otherwise 'these things will build up' and there are some stains that never come out you just have to overcompensate for.

The dress curls up on the carpet like a black cat. Her large, white feet head for the bathroom. She turns on the tap and watches the water choke and tumble out. It's so loud. She hushes it. Afraid something in the air will find her out.

A moth is flapping for the light. She forgot she had left the window open. She swears under her breath. Moths are *such* a pain. Its grey wings beat against the lamp shade incessantly; a small, scared child desperate to be let back in the house. Why do we think that we will be so much safer where it's light? The hot bulb sizzles the moth's wings like the pale white of an egg. It falls, fried, onto the cold tiles. And there's another lesson, she thinks.

The bath is filling up. She pours in a bit too much bath foam and swishes it around with the bottom of the bottle. Bubbles pop up and grow and multiply, like bacteria in a petri dish. She stops herself. *She* is dirty; but this bath, this bath will make her clean. She rethinks the bubbles. Glass baubles; glass baubles on a Christmas tree. Floating. That will do, and that will make her smile.

A bubble pops. She looks down at herself. The wide bridge of her hips; her pink thighs like joints of ham. She can almost see the finger marks still, almost. Big, thick, finger marks; striping across her like a zebra. She shudders and checks her bath.

It isn't deep enough. Not for tonight, and her feet are starting to get cold. She walks back onto the landing where the carpet is warmer and rough. Her phone beeps, so she heads for her bedroom where she has left it on the bed.

She sees a slice of herself in the mirror as she walks through the door. A, thin white ghost. Her phone is flashing, indignant to have been left for so long. It isn't the deal these days, it is saying, we expect to be with you all of the time. But she is peeling life off her, layer by layer, you see, and that includes the phone. The phone, and Facebook, and answering the door. Work will be left unopened, like an unwanted letter. She will put chewing gum in the lock. Seal all her windows. Block up her chimney with towels. Father Christmas isn't calling this year, nobody is. Maybe, if she peels off enough of this shit we wear every day, she can peel off her own skin. Maybe she can walk around, muscle and sinew exposed; red raw and stringy. Free.

It's him. "Sorry to hear that, hope you feel better. There are always other nights 😊"

The smiley face irritates her. He isn't the kind of man to smile, really. She can't picture him smiling as he wrote the message, so why include it? She tosses it back on the bed and heads back to the bathroom.

In her absence, the water has grown into a blueish hippo. It sits in the bath, so big it is clearly stuck. There is a bluish hippo stuck in my bath, she ponders to herself. She laughs a deep laugh and turns off the tap.

First she lifts one leg, then the other. Her skin screams red as it sinks into the boiling water. She notices it change colour, as steam rises up to her nose, but she feels nothing. Her legs start to grow, until they look huge. Huge and long and pink. Until she starts to feel as if they do not belong to her anymore. Whose are these great big legs, she wonders? They have distorted and blurred through the water. She feels as though she could get up and walk away and still they would be there, like logs in a river.

She can hear her phone beeping from the bedroom. She wonders what on earth he can have left to say. Unless it is somebody else? She has forgotten who else there is, really. Maybe there is no one. Maybe everything outside of her windows has crashed and is burning.

Her thighs sink into the water. She lowers her back and shoulders under, too, resting her head and neck on the edge of a bath and staring up at the window. It is shut, and outside is unforgivably black. The wallpaper is dirty where it reaches the ceiling, and there is a cobweb in the shape of a star. A dusty star, she thinks, because nobody makes wishes anymore.

She closes her eyes and waits for today to wash away.

The bubbles pop one by one. The foam melts and the boiling water turns tepid. Her burnt red skin wrinkles and turns into rubber. The tap drips. The night stays dark, and the window stays shut. Still she does not open her eyes.

The air closes its eyes and goes to sleep, hovering in that drowsy way it hangs around at night time. The water turns grey. A black fly floats upside down by her knee, washing up onto her leg as if it has been shipwrecked. The tap drips. The cobweb loses its grip on one side of the wall and hangs like a dream catcher; mouth open, gaping, for a dream.

The night starts to wake up.

Dawn rubs its eyes. The sky is grubby and blurry; birds yawn; the cobweb falls.

The sun comes out.

A sunbeam falls through the window and cuts into the water. A rainbow swims on the surface. Her skin warms and yellows. The fly marks her knee like a freckle. The cobweb spreads across her chest like a necklace. The water blurs the edges of her body. She melts into the bath.

Her phone beeps again.

The flash illuminates the shadow in the landing, where washing is hanging. Her bed sheets are draped over the banisters. A lone, spotty sock is on the floor.

Morning comes into the flat like a flock of yellow birds.

There is a knock on the door. It gets louder and more desperate. There are shouts and calls and a tiny, green bird flies by the bathroom window so close that its wings graze the glass.

There is noise outside. Sirens. She would think it was burning out there, after all. What has happened to the man next door? She would think. Such a scene.

The bathroom is quiet, though. And clean. On the blue tiles, a moth lies flat on its back. Its wings spread out like arms. The sunbeam just misses it. It looks cold and broken, and all the while, with her hair spread behind her, the woman floats, and smiles. Yesterday lies murky in the bottom of the bath.