

Only a Child

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Around 800 words

The door creaks as the young woman stumbles through the door. The keys wrapped around her fist jingles as she drags her hand across the wall in search of the light switch. She squints her eyes once she finds it as lights up the otherwise dark house. The lump in her throat she has been trying to drown the whole night grows and burns. In other circumstances her heart would have lept out of her chest at the noises she's making but the suffocating feeling in her throat, the clouded vision and limbs like jelly makes her forget. It makes her forget that the whole house is broken, her own tears and blood seeping out of its cracks and only one wrong step is all it takes for the rotten pieces to give out beneath her feet. She forgets this and carelessly takes off her high heels, blood on her heels she can't feel, and slowly moves towards the stairs.

A bath.

A bath is what she needs.

Wash away the guilt that clings to her as she walks past family photos.

The young woman sneaks into the bathroom and closes the door. She takes off her clothes and forces herself not to think of its smells or stains or implications. She wants to get rid of them, burn them, leave them there on the floor forever. She reaches out her hand and turns out the faucet and lets the water flow as she holds her cold arms around herself, bone to bone. She sees her own reflection in the corner of her eye. A pale ghost in the shape of a human, ribs poking out through long fingers and a hunched back with a protruding spine.

The young woman looks down and lets her bangs fall in front of her eyes. The lump in her throat grows and her nails dig into her sides. She wishes she was a snake, so she could shed her own skin and get rid of it.

Eventually she sinks down into the bath, long pale legs disappear beneath the surface and the shades of blue and purple that covers them become obscure. She drags her fingers through the braids that rests on her shoulders and lets the raven black hair spread out around her as the steam rises. She prefers ice cold baths, to feel, to be here in the present. However right now all she wanted was for the lump to disappear.

The door to the bathroom opens and the young woman turns as her mother walks in. The girl pulls up her knees to her chest and hugs them. She forgot to lock the door. She forgets a lot of things when she doesn't want to remember. The lump in her throat grows rapidly, choking her and she has to open her mouth to even get any air in. The girl glances up at her mother for a quick second and is met with pale blue eyes identical to her own, accompanied by an expression she can't read. The lump grows more and more and her heart beats faster and faster. She wishes she could move. Run away. Claw at her own skin, dig and dig until she can wrap her hands around her own heart and make it stop beating.

Her mother moves closer but the harsh words she's expecting never comes. This is not meant to happen. They have a routine. She comes home late, they fight, they cry, they go into their separate rooms. She lifts her forehead from where it had been resting against her knees and turns her whole face to the mom. The older woman reaches out her hand and

cups the girl's cheek. She starts to carefully clean and dry the girl's face. She drags soft but steady hands over her glitter covered eyelids, her dark eyebrows and shaking blue tinted lips. The girl's eyes burn. The lump in her throat would choke her to death.

“Please don’t hate me,” she whispers. The mom strokes her cold cheeks but doesn’t answer. Instead she gets a towel and helps the girl out of the bathtub. She wraps the towel around her and sits down on the closed toilet lid. The girl climbs into her lap, her long and gangly body trying to make itself as small as possible to fit.

“You are my child. I could never hate you,” says the mom with a soft voice. The lump in her throat makes its way up and out and the burning tears escape her eyes. The child's small hands grip onto the mom's big arms that surround her frail body.

They make their way into the child's bedroom. The mom tucks her child in, surrounding her with warm blankets and fluffy pillows. She gives her a warm kiss on the forehead, skin to skin, and leaves the room.