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The Alibi

by Victoria Watson

I sit in the bath picking the scab on my knee and I can hear my mother singing from the kitchen. She doesn't sing too well, just picks up old tunes from the radio and gets the words wrong. I like her voice though; it reminds me of when my father used to dance her around the kitchen table. My Dad used to be fun, he would show me how to skim stones. They don't dance any more and I can't remember how to skim stones, they just sink to the bottom without a trace.

I hear my mum slam the oven door and it makes the windows rattle. She calls through the door, "hey mermaid, don't forget those knees." I rub the tidemark on the side of the bath, my toes are pearly shells beneath the sea and my wrinkled fingers barnacles on a ship.

I hear her humming now, zipping then re-zipping a dress. The clink of her bracelet and the snap of a lipstick, these noises flow through into the bathroom.

The doorbell rings and mum dances past, a cloud of perfume follows her, it makes my nose itch.

She opens the door and uses a voice I don't recognise. It makes laughter catch in my throat and I hide my face in a face cloth. I jump noiselessly out of the bath, water dripping off my fingers and rat tail hair and peek around the door. There is a man in the hallway with a bunch of roses and a moustache. I see my mum throw her head back and laugh this big crazy teeth laugh that ends with a flick of her hair.

I stand on the stool and act out the same big crazy teeth laugh in the mirror but mine makes no sound. I hear the front door shut and I slip like an eel back in my bath.

I hear only mumbled voices, Mum is giggling like someone is tickling her. I feel embarrassed for her. Then I hear the sound like the noise the fridge door makes when you open and shut it over and over. I usually get yelled at when I make the door make that noise. I like it though, it sounds like kissing. I nip to the door again and see my mum's back with the man's hand on it.

I wrap myself up small and sit on the bathmat. My hair drip, drip, drips on the cold tiles and I watch them make a puddle.

Then my Mum is there and she is rubbing my wet hair and telling me

“Into bed my little alibi.”

Soon Dad is home and they are shouting in the kitchen about Mum wearing her purple dress. It's a dumb argument, Mum only just put the dress back on.

I lie in bed the hot sheets trapping me. I rub my leg with my big toe and the scab comes off.