

THE BATH

Written for "The Listener" by "TUI"

SATURDAY night was bath-night. For a whole month I had looked forward to this moment. Oh, yes, I had had sponge baths almost every day—a loathsome business in which you stand in the middle of the bedroom with a minute tin bowl and pass a damp cloth over your body in bits and while your tummy is being washed, your bottom feels clammy and cold; and you never seem to be able to get it properly warm and dry for ages afterwards. The bath had been going to be fixed for a long time and had actually been mended on Wednesday—a very simple matter of pouring a bit more cement into the bottom. But Saturday night was Bath-night, and even if it had been fixed on Monday we would still have had to wait till Saturday because that is the night when it is right and proper that one should have a bath.

Before tea on Saturday, the boiler in the corner of the wash-house was lit and the acrid woodsmoke from the leaky chimney pervaded the house. After tea the beautiful hot water was bucketed

through the smoky haze into the bath in the other corner of the wash-house. One could hardly see one end of the room from the other and the smoke made the eyes sting, but I cried cheerfully, because I was going to wallow in a delicious soapy froth right up to my neck (I hoped).

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AT last everything was ready and I stepped into the scented water (I had added some eau-de-cologne, since this was a special occasion). The water was soft and lathered easily. The bottom was extremely rough where successive amounts of cement had been poured in and I felt my seat would look like a rubber stamp, but I lay back and luxuriated.

Along the walls on every available ledge there were bottles—bottles of all shapes and sizes, and I marvelled at the variety of uses humanity has for bottles. They had contained vinegar, essence, wipe, perfume, cordial, jam, preserves, hair-tonic, sauce, whisky, and all varieties of medicines for human or animal consumption. They were all represented,

for it is an eccentricity of my aunt who has lived in this house for forty years that nothing that has any slightest chance of future usefulness is ever thrown away. All is saved and a great deal of the product of this saving habit is concentrated in the wash-house.

Packed all along the side of the bath, allowing only a small space in which to approach it, are cartons each methodically filled with empty match-boxes, paper-bags, small cardboard cartons, brown paper, string, screws and nails, empty cigarette packets, tins, corks, and old clothes.

* * *

A SMALL kitten climbed up on a dirty clothes basket and viewed me from the wooden sides of the bath. He looked surprised and interested—too interested. I was almost embarrassed.



"Nothing that has any chance of future usefulness is ever thrown away"

I continued my reflections on my aunt's character. I decided that to be wealthy and to live in the back-blocks would be pleasant, but to be poor in

(continued on next page)

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