The Last Resort Soap



The Last Resort Soap *was written by **Alison Little** and centres on the quiet, often invisible reality of hygiene insecurity — the strain of not having enough money to buy basic necessities such as shampoo, conditioner, or soap. The story responds to a deeply personal period during the COVID pandemic, when the author was grieving the loss of her partner to Covid while also suffering from Covid herself and the lasting effects of long Covid. These experiences were compounded by depression and the sudden loss of employment caused by lockdown. Through an ordinary moment in a bathroom, the piece captures how financial hardship, grief and isolation can reduce life to small acts of survival — and how routine becomes a fragile form of order in the aftermath of loss.*

She lowers herself into the bath as if easing into an apology.

The water takes the first layer from her—just her skin, not the rest of it—and carries it away in thin grey swirls. A shell breaks. Grime loosens. She watches it cloud the water and hopes, briefly, that feeling lighter might work the same way.

Before.
Before what happened.
Before everything.

Isolation sits on the rim of the tub like a quiet witness.

The shampoo bottle is split open on the sink, its plastic ribs bent back. She has scraped it dry with a finger already, twice. There is nothing left to coax from it. Money is gone. Work is gone. Friday is a small, distant promise. What remains must become food. Necessities.

She reaches for the only survivor: a barely touched bar of Imperial Leather, the label still stubbornly intact. It feels heavier than it should.

The soap drags thinly through her hands. It flakes when she presses it into her hair. Almost no foam. Almost no comfort. The greasy strands resist, then finally give, as the scum of yesterday loosens and slips away from her scalp, her shoulders, her back. It sinks, pale and soft, into the bathwater below.

Hair in need of washing.
Body in need of washing.
Life in need of washing.

She tries again. It makes little difference.

At least there is conditioner.
Thank God.

Her hair softens under it, improves by degrees—smoother, glossier—but not enough to feel like repair. Only disguise.

She stands, unsteady on the thinning bath mat, and dries herself with the old towel, stiff with age and soap residue. She dries herself fully. Always fully. As if leaving even a trace of damp might invite something back in.

She looks at the bar again.

The last-resort soap.

It will be used again.

She will try to turn her hair into something nicer. Something more—presentable, maybe. She doesn't like makeup. Or nice clothes. She feels like trackies. She will put something on. Something under something else. Enough to go downstairs. Enough to pretend there is a next small task to find.

She will dry her hair.
She will straighten it.

Some order, at least, can still be made.

Alison Little

About the author

Alison Little is a writer whose work explores themes of loss, poverty, mental health and the quiet realities of everyday survival. This piece reflects her lived experience during the Covid pandemic, when grief, illness and financial insecurity shaped both her life and her writing. More examples of her work can be found on her blog at:

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