

Running Water

Lucy Hamilton

She awoke just after 4a.m. It was the nausea that woke her. She knew she wouldn't sleep again. The same infuriating pattern.

She stayed in bed until 4:40, then crept along the hallway, undressed in the bathroom and raised the lever of the shower. A groan in the piping. She pulled her arm out of the way before the icy trickle could reach her.

She stood naked before the mirror, waiting for the water to heat, for the room to fill with steam, a warm fog to embrace her. It had been weeks and she still missed it. As she twisted from side to side, she watched goose-pricked flesh slide over her rib cage – extra flesh she didn't recognise. A few pounds heavier, she must be.

She tested the temperature and nudged the dial hotter. Then she stepped into the cubicle to escape the freezing floor tiles.

She leaned forwards to catch the chill of the water on her chest, against her sternum and her breasts, tender and swollen. She shivered as it found her ribs and the creases of her armpits. Then gradually, she eased the rest of her body into the torrent.

Her belly was already rounding. Three months, she'd say, at least. Her body had known for weeks now, waiting impatiently for her to feel it.

She couldn't be. But she was. She traced her fingers around the swelling, wishing it smaller. They had no plan in place yet for leaving.

She scanned the empty bottles of shampoo on the ledge beneath the window, caps unscrewed and rebalanced where they'd scooped out the remnants. She'd been meaning to bin them, all speckled with mildew; she wouldn't allow herself to wonder if soon the vessels would be useful.

She reached for the razor, glued to the tile where the massage strip had melted, and began to slide it up her thigh, from the knee towards her pelvis. The blades were too dull and her strokes

too quick to be effective. Flecks of rust scratched at the skin, but the scraping was oddly pleasant.

She hadn't shaved for a while now, but she didn't think he'd even noticed. For some, the bombs had brought them closer but for him it no longer seemed important. She closed her eyes, and tried to imagine his hands inside the water, smoothing the goosebumps on her shoulders and her waist, pulling her closer.

She pushed the window and peered out into the grey, dusty morning. It was getting harder these days to sleep, but every dawn, at least, was quiet.

A flash of red inside her thigh.

She scanned between her legs. And for a sweet, ecstatic second, she thought she knew where it had come from. But then the sting came; she sighed, she'd only caught herself with the razor. She watched the fading bloodworm wind sadly into the plug hole.

He'd be up soon, disturbed by the sounds of the shower. He didn't blame her for this, but if he had, she felt she would prefer it.

She rubbed the cut with her finger and watched the trickle of red fade to yellow, and when the stinging subsided, she reached for the lever.

But something stopped her from pressing down. One minute more, it told her.

She wasn't sure how much longer they'd have running water.