

## Bathroom Break

Story by Pennsylvania Kite Weather

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While the Manniver family had safely gotten through the hurricane, the mermaid they discovered in their backyard the morning after didn't appear so lucky.

The woman was ripped away from the ocean just like she was torn from the pages of a book of fairytales. Bruised a bit and flopping about desperately in the sodden grass, the ground's moisture had only been doing just enough to keep her alive.

The wife demanded her husband inflate the kiddie pool they had been storing in their shed for years. Their son Jake ran back and forth between the kitchen and the outside with a milk jug filled with water.

Soon the mermaid was lowered gingerly into the pool with the help of the father. She breathed a sigh of relief as her silver tail touched the water, and took a moment to roll around in the shallow depth to get all of her body covered.

The Mannivers all stood away from this strange creature as she tended to herself. She had a vibrant teal head of hair, thick strands flowing past her shoulders to her elbows. A top of thin woven seaweed clung to a pair of small breasts. The shimmering tail, bunching like a steel tube made of muscle, snaked under the surface. It was a little longer than her upper body and was adorned with a crescent-shaped tailfin.

The family whispered amongst themselves. "Mom, do we have to keep her?" Jake asked innocently.

"We need to call the police," mumbled the father. "Maybe the city aquarium."

"Shouldn't we at least ask her her name?" suggested the mother, stepping forward. "You do have a name, don't you?"

The mermaid sat back against the cushiony edge of the pool and let her tail lie limply in front of her, half-submerged. "It's Opalescence..." she replied in a hushed voice, and looked awestruck at the house behind the family. "I can't believe in the human world...!"

"For now," Mr. Manniver said, crossing his arms. "I won't risk our household getting in trouble from keeping you here."

"W-Wait, please!" Opalescence began to beg. "I'd love to stay! The ocean's such a bland, empty place. All I need to live on the surface is some water!"

The trio looked amongst each other. Surely there was something to gain from having such a unique addition to the family. The parents wanted to give it a chance, and Jake thought this would be a lot cooler than his old pet fish that died.

"Well, power's still out," Mr. Manniver said to his family. "Might as well spend some time talking. First should come some things to know about how this world works."

"Really? Tell me all of it...!" Opalescence eagerly scooted herself to the other side of the pool and rested her chin in her hands. The two adults went to retrieve a pair of lawn chairs to teach her, among other things, the rules of the house, and Jake soon went back inside to play on his phone.

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The Mannivers worked together to keep her comfortable, like taking turns refilling the pool every so often. But the most they could do was expose her to every little bit of human culture. Mrs. Manniver found a box of old magazines and the mermaid stared wide-eyed at the pages until they got soggy (she wasn't literate though and just liked the pictures).

They shared their meals with her, often floating Tupperware containers on the surface of the water. The mermaid was delighted to sample everything from grilled steak to Chinese take-out; they were all tantalizingly new flavors for someone who had nothing but seafood before.

"Tell me how work went, Mr. Manniver," she'd plead with a smile. "Is the copier fixed? Did they fire Paul yet?"

Jake once went out to her for help with his homework and they both scratched their heads trying to figure out long division.

During the nights, Opalescence could only stare into the living room through the glass door while the family relaxed indoors. The glow of a screen behind the couch kept her curiosity until she curled up for the night. There was the driving rain some days that bored her since nobody would come outside. An eagle once divebombed for the end of her tail, and she barely managed to ward it off with a swat from her fin.

Soon it seemed leaves were tumbling into her domain every minute, on top of the fact she was shivering more often than not. The captivating smile of hers sank into a scowl the more she turned slow laps in the pool.

The father came out one evening when she was on her last nerves. "Made your favorite fish sticks just for you tonight, Opal," he smiled. "How are you doing?"

"What do you think?" the mermaid pouted, hands tucked into her armpits.

He paused and then crouched down to level with her. "You know, I get it if you're bored in here. I've been meaning to ask if you'd like it better inside. Winter is coming."

"The inside?" she repeated breathlessly, and leaned on the deflating sides of the pool. "Ooh, please can I see what it's like in there?"

"We'll see what we can do," Mr. Manniver chuckled, handing over the food to her.

The move came the next evening, the father holding her over his shoulder. Opal found the living room and the ascent to the second floor a mystical experience, for it was unfortunately the last she'd see of it for a while. She was crestfallen being lowered into a tub that was even *more* cramped than the pool.

"So this is my new home?" she asked, staring at her tailfin tucked up against the wall in front of her.

The family had similarly packed themselves into the bathroom to look at her. "Uh-huh," Mr. Manniver nodded, brushing moisture off of his arm into the pearl-white sink. "Just about all we can do. But don't worry, this door'll be open so you can call for us anytime, upstairs or down."

The mermaid settled back against the porcelain siding. "I guess this'll work then..."



Mrs. Manniver waved to her. “Let us know if you need anything, dear. Maybe now that you’re indoors we can try board games someday!” She turned to go and the father followed, leaving Jake alone with the creature.

He stepped up. “This is supposed to be *my* bathroom, you know,” he stated, crossing his arms but sounding unsure about accusing her.

“Oh, I’m sorry...” she frowned. “What do you mean by—” She was cut off by the shower curtain being pulled across her eyesight. The inside of the tub darkened with the turquoise color of the drape. Opal didn’t speak and held her chin in her hands, letting the footsteps recede and leaving her watching the rippling of the shallow water.

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Slowly integrating with the three humans was fine, but it was draining—trapped in a white-walled prison for innumerable days. Opal’s idle hands longed for something to entertain her with. She was taught how to run the water to adjust the temperature of the bath as she pleased, but she wouldn’t want to get the Mannivers upset by flooding the upstairs. She could glimpse bottles further up on a shelf in her abode; if she could stand herself up by clinging to the shower curtain to reach them, she’d be sating her adventurousness.

The mermaid tried that plan on a Sunday morning, when the Mannivers would depart for several hours and left her all to herself. She took the plastic covering in her hands and pulled. A ring popped out of the rod above and startled her, and so she tried it again and splashed back down with the curtain in her hands.

“Interesting...” she mused, smoothing her hand over it. It seemed like a net, only that it could catch liquid inside it instead. That was exactly what the crafty mermaid decided to try out, spreading it out on the bottom of the tub and laying her tail within it.

She began a bout of trial-and-error as to how she was going to secure the curtain. Soon she had it messily wrapped around her length, locking in a film of water against her scales, and secured it with a knot through a spare ring. She noticed she couldn’t move her tail as easily as before when she lifted it above the water to inspect it.

Feeling confident though, Opal hoisted herself and her giant fish-burrito invention up and smacked down onto the tile. Some water dribbled out at the fin end, but she only beamed. Pushing herself on her palms, she inched down the hallway and got to the top of the steps. Carefully she slid down the flight and arrived at the living room. Should she continue on to the kitchen by the other wall? No, she determined, this was where the couch with the glowing screen was all those nights before.

Leaving water on the hardwood floor in her wake, Opal came to the foot of the television and was stymied by it appearing dark and silent. Her guess was to pick up the nearest thing sitting on the coffee table, a black rectangle with colored dots all over. She was awestruck when the screen came to life from pushing the top-most button.

Now that she believed her escapade was a work of genius, and she could live in the house however she liked, she triumphantly put her back against the couch and pushed her way up onto it. Her body spanned the leather seats as she relaxed and watched an infomercial program like it was an everyday thing to do.

At last, she could be independent as long as she had some water against her scales. She snuggled her head against the armrest and laughed at the thought of surprising the family like this.



And in time, the garage door opened and the trio stepped in. Opal fluttered a hand above her head and grinned. “Hi there! Surprised to see me?”

“But it’s not fair!” she protested. Mr. Manniver’s jaw was set as he lowered her back into the tub, the curtain discarded on the floor. “I’ve done nothing wrong!”

He spread his arms. “You made a mess! This thing’s torn up, my wife and son are mopping up the downstairs—”

“I just want to live like the rest of you!” She slapped the water in frustration. “Why can’t I just be a normal person? This stupid body...!”

“Until we figure something out, please, for God’s sake, just stay put?” He went to leave, and took the balled-up shower curtain as well. The bathroom door closed behind him, making it impossible for the mermaid to go anywhere else.

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That was the final straw. All she could do was think about the conflict swirling around her while she was shut in. She yearned to stay in the surface world, but she constantly worried about the family arranging to send her back to the ocean. There was no use being disobedient and banging her fists against the door and screaming; that’d just get her thrown out even faster.

The adults entered the bathroom now to only drop off meals and collect empty plates. They offered a question as to how she was doing most times, but it was hardly a pleasantry at this point.

Her new habit was crawling to the door and lying there as long as possible, putting her ear to the gap between the woodwork and the floor to listen for anyone coming. While she normally heard their footsteps skirting by, she picked up a conversation for once.

“Tom, it’s getting annoying,” complained Mrs. Manniver. “The family next door asked again about what was going on in the backyard all those times.”

“We’ll just have to keep telling them it was nothing.”

“But they keep bringing it up. What if they saw Opal? Took photos?”

“No S.W.A.T. vans are descending on our home yet, are they?” Footsteps advanced through the hall to the front of the home to actually check.

“But they *could*, honey, that’s what I’m afraid of. ...The police questioned that one man in our neighborhood after that explosion at his house,” she continued quietly. “The one who had another type of those monsters on his property, and he killed the thing.”

“So what, you can’t honestly be saying to do the same with her...”

“No, no! We just need to get rid of... *move* her before something bad *does* happen. To us!”

“I’ll look into it,” came the calm reply. “She deserves to be back in her natural habitat, I think, and we can hire someone to take her there.”



Opal suddenly pounded her fist against the door and shouted. “No! I don’t wanna leave! I’m supposed to have a say!” Salty tears were slipping down her face as she put her head against the exit and kept voicing her demands. She scrabbled for the knob above her and made a cry in frustration that it wouldn’t budge.

“She realized we barred it,” said Mr. Manniver glumly. “I’m getting Jake’s old radio. I need to try something.”

The conversation stopped and all the while the mermaid threw her tantrum, tail thrashing and fingers clawing in desperation to simply get the door *open* again; to talk, be understood, show that she’d still be a good guest once she calmed down.

Wretchedly she sat back and sobbed until a pleasant song began to play from the other side, filtering under the gap. Gentle singing was heard over the strumming of an instrument, and the easy tune seized hold of her for a moment. The vocals then rose in power, accompanied by a choir so enthralling that Opal didn’t regard the footsteps slowly backing away. With her spirit quelled she closed her eyes; if this was another form of human entertainment, she wouldn’t let it distract her from the fact she needed to find a way out.

The music faded. “It’s now 7:45 P.M.,” a male voice chimed in. “Thank you for tuning into WPKW at 96.5 F.M., your local source for Christian rock and talk...” Opal climbed back into the tub and settled in, staring at the door and letting the faceless voices carry on.

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Days passed, and the radio never got switched off. For the mermaid, it became something like a cellmate. Or more like a dozen of them, each of them offering advice or telling stories, talking of quotes from a long book. All Opal did was listen detachedly, and try to piece together what human virtue meant. Justice, too. Love and forgiveness. They were foreign concepts.

She swiped a comb from the bottom drawer of the sink and would groom herself as she stewed over her options. The toilet wouldn’t be able to get her back to the ocean. The shower drain, she had poked at the tiny holes fruitlessly.

“How are you liking that thing?” Mrs. Manniver once peered in and asked, setting down a fresh plate of lasagna on the toilet seat.

“I don’t know,” Opal replied, gazing blankly over the edge of the tub.

The woman gave the mermaid a small smile and put a fork beside her before retreating. “Well, eat up. I’ll be back to get the plate in an hour.”

After the door clicked shut, the radio could be heard prattling on again. “Be wary of liars and sinners especially. Those people are preached against by God’s people *everywhere*, you see? Sincerity is measured by deeds. From John himself, he says ‘let us not love with word with tongue, but in deed and truth’...”

Opal sat herself up and draped her tail over the edge of the tub, piercing the fork through the top layer of the lasagna. She nodded sagely as she contemplated her escape.

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“And a happy, beautiful Sunday morning to all our listeners. Welcome back to WPKW.” It was spoken by a host who was obviously some kind of leader, warm, steady, and inviting. “We are just about to take a few calls from anybody in our community who has a question about their daily life, and might need a little help from the word of God.”

Opal’s face lifted from beneath the water, glistening and stoic, like she was a long-lost statue in the center of Atlantis being raised from a millennium under the sea. It sure felt like an eternity. She was staring up at the shower head, hooked up above like some unblinking, unweeping eye.

“What question do you want to ask?”

“How do I get out of here?” the mermaid spoke.

“Hi, I have a bit of a relationship issue...” came a young woman’s timid voice. “Is that fine?”

“By all means,” said the host. “Give us the amount of detail you’d like.”

The mermaid could tear her hair out as she bolted upright. “For the love of the seven seas, *I’ve heard this three times before!*” she shrieked. No one would answer, as the house was empty this morning again, and the radio never cared about being repetitive.

Hardly anything could break the cyclical programming of the radio, it seemed. The voices, the songs, the messages; how in the world could humanity be even *more* monotonous than life in the ocean? And whatever they were trying to get her to understand, no matter how many ways it was phrased, it was all supposed to be one meaning that would always, always confuse her. At this point she just wanted it to quiet down, and submerging herself to block out the sounds was only productive for so long.

Opal turned her gaze upwards to the shower’s source again. Some tubing came out of the wall and looped down around the valve, then snaked its way up to the exit. As she ran her hand over its flexible, metallic material, the same voice that spoke to her about the shower curtain told her to tug on this object too.

“I’ve known him for a long time,” continued the caller as the hose rattled. “He’s so sweet, but it feels like... the longer we’ve been together, the closer and closer he gets.”

Opal took the hose hand-over-hand and gathered up her strength.

“He’s not mean, he’s not abusive, it’s just that he wants to hang around me *all the time*. And that makes sense! It’s only a matter of time until we get engaged, haha! It’s just— ohh, it’s ridiculous how much he manipulates me to stay with him.” A sigh crackled from the speaker, just as the shower head separated from its tubes with a pop. The mermaid scrambled to inspect the plumbing which flopped into the water with her.

“Is that so?” asked the male as Opal held up the hollow pipe to her eye, and then tried reaching one of her fingers inside of it. “There are all sorts of ways that things can separate us from what really matters. Maybe he distances you from spending time with your family and friends, maybe shopping or another hobby, but above all it’s a departure from God.”

Still feeling a little destructive, Opal spied the colored bottles that sat up on a shelf. She brought up the comb from the bottom of the tub and gave it her best aim. Plastic containers came clattering, splashing down.



“While we stress spending time with Him, *of course* he also wants you to take time for yourself...! To be you and live to your fullest. If someone’s being selfish with you, that’s an unfortunate thing, and let’s talk about how we can work on that.”

She turned and squeezed and shook and pulled on one of the bottles, until at last one of the caps came off. When she tried to see what was inside, some pale pink liquid pooled out into her palm. The flowery smell of it reminded her a bit of the outside, nice enough to try sipping the taste of it.

“Yuck!” The bitterness seemed to clog up her throat and she rushed to drink down some of the bath water. Alarming, the mixture had gone and tainted her home with its gross aftertaste too, and on top of that a cloud seemed to be rising up upon the waves. Opal had no time to deal with that; she rushed to turn on the water and scrambled for the hose as it flowed out some fresher liquid to rinse with.

For a time she just drank with her lips over the opening, closely watching the little bed of foam that was forming. Opal scooped over to rescue the bottle from spilling out more, ignoring the label while she grew accustomed to swallowing the warm water. The bad taste was long gone, but it was relaxing to keep downing what was practically her lifeblood. She let it run, able to feel the faint splashing within her. This was a little safer than overfilling the tub for no reason, after all.

Feeling full within a few more moments, Opal lifted the hose away. Then she suddenly coughed— didn’t she stop drinking? Apprehensively she sat up on the edge to check her stomach, and her insides were making a burbling noise like a natural spring. Something was rising up, pressing with an uncomfortable tingle against the walls of her belly.

She groaned as she locked her arms over her middle, compressing, with a bit of quiet fascination, the plushy feeling building up beneath her skin. It gradually went away, and left her staring at the mass of bubbles wavering there in the tub. She didn’t want to move, even as the running hose made its contents spill over the edge and spread a puddle across the floor. The bottle of soapy liquid was also trying to drift by and fall out, so Opal snatched it up.

“I want you to first weigh your options,” the host continued from the other side. “What’s going to be the best way for you to remove yourself from your situation?”

The mermaid had surveyed this all enough. She put the hose down on the floor and shimmied down to sit there next to it, facing the white, blockaded bathroom door. Her silver tail extended a line towards the outside, resting in the shimmery film of water that was trickling out into the hall. Opal took a deep breath and poured out the elixir into her mouth until she was ready to gag, then knocked it back. Next began swallow after swallow to wash everything out, and more importantly, to test the mermaid’s theory.

The reaction was immediate, her body beginning to churn again with the mixing around of soap and water. The sensation brewed up, flaring out her stomach into a pregnant state and beyond. Opal eased her hand over it, patted it firmly, a comfortable fluffiness to it above the heavier liquid spreading through the bottom. All it needed was some tender jostling to accelerate its growth for a moment, stretching her out with ease, eliciting a coo around the hose.

Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe the family was going to be outraged with her and toss her out onto the curb, or maybe she wouldn’t even get as far as the door.

“Now, to my caller, I don’t want you to be afraid of retaliation from anyone. God shall give you His protection, inspire in you faith in yourself that you’re making the right decision.”



The guzzling continued, with Opal shifting her hips to get comfortable. Her belly sagged onto her tail, rolling along the slimy scales. The mermaid played around, lifting her fin end and dropping it, making her inflating gut slosh and grumble. Coaxing it forth, mesmerized as it drooped to the sides and brushed along the tile, all she could do was caress it and drink.

“Hm!?” She clapped a hand around the base of her tail, where her hips would reside. “Mmm...” The scales felt loose, padded, not so much a hunk of muscle anymore. She rocked on her broadening tush and splashed around the water inside, the girth of her lower body propping up the mountain of wobbly gut.

Over the pale horizon of her skin, Opal felt her stomach finally wedge up against the door. The pressure doubled back towards her and she winced; space was running out fast. The hose left her lips with a weary groan, and she reached for the bottle once again. The mermaid held it high and began to desperately chug, the soap fizzing and boiling up as soon as it reached her insides.

The empty bottle was thrown away and she returned to the hose with a whine, taking off with a long, drawn-out gurgle. Her belly began to climb up the door, pinched between the sink and the other wall, the knob poking in too. Discomfort clashed with the lust for freedom, the metallic tang of water from the pipes. She couldn't stop now.

“Let your spirit soar with hope!” The host's enthusiasm barely carried above the sounds of her rampant expansion. “Reach out to Him and let Him rescue you! Break free!”

It happened all at once. The bathroom door cracked in half, and Opal's belly seized the chance to explode through the entire frame as well. She crashed through with an unbridled, relieved cry, all her contents settling and spreading with the sloshes of a giant washing machine. There was no time for a breather even with the hose discarded. The mermaid could feel it coming again, all the suds welling up for another chance to multiply, fill her form even bigger within the confines of the hallway. Opal craned her neck up and started to pant.

She could destroy this entire house. She could smash this stupid human place to bits, pump up huge and triumphant to the size of a whale. And yet her belly throbbed and so did her tail, each a dangerous, quivering lump, stuffed to the gills with fluid. Distant, dull pops like fireworks within her ramped up the activity even more, and completely drowned out the radio. Her stomach was practically alive, snarling and creaking through the stubborn obstacles in her way, oblivious to the poor shrimp of a woman clinging valiantly on the other side.

Opal belched out a bubble all of a sudden; it floated upwards and upwards until it drifted and gracefully popped against her swollen skin. She whimpered and covered her mouth, every grunt, every suppressed hiccup, every tremor resulting in another electric surge of inches to her frame. To stop her coughing, she thrust the hose back between her cheeks and held onto her stomach for dear life. Stretched flesh crammed the entirety of the bathroom, compacted perilously between the narrow walls. It ballooned uncontrollably outside, shoving aside furniture and pictures in the crumbling hallway, rubbing against the walls— and she could even feel the ceiling hemming her in.

Water dribbled from her lips as she just couldn't force any more into herself. Opal spat out the hose and leaned away from the rumbling mass of stomach, anchoring her arms against the side of the tub, bracing herself. Her skin smooshed against her cheek, and her individual scales, each strained to the size of a teacup, flared out to nearly engulf her like a beanbag chair. “Oh please, oh please...!” she prayed. “Just a little more... Ahhhh-haaah...!” She floundered from the pressure, the line-thin breadth of her skin extending through the halls, quivering as she sagged over the top step. While so vast, so seemingly flexible still, she knew her brewing and quaking liquid-packed body was about to burst apart.





With her face flushed red, her eyes snapped open, realizing with the last of her shuddering breaths that she was growing slower. Her belly rippled and heaved with the limits of its give; the groaning of wooden planks and the squealing, keening of rubbery skin hit their loudest, shrillest note...!

“Ohhh God—!”

*KABLOOOOOORSSHHH!*

The dome ruptured, a quick volley of bubbles popping as they hit the air, and a tsunami of soapy water coursed through the rooms of the second floor. Foam oozed around corners and rode the torrent that came crashing down the staircase, flooding all in the path.

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The Mannivers’ silver van turned off from within the garage. As the family approached the door to the inside, Jake was first to spot the puddle that had trickled out underneath his shoes. “Woah, lookit—“

Mr. Manniver opened the door to a foot of water that cascaded down the step, drenching the bottom of his khakis.

“Tom...!”

“The...” the husband held back a curse. He hoisted himself into the living room and waded to the kitchen sink first, muttering as he scoured for a leak. The others came in and stared in disbelief at the heaps of froth sitting in corners or spilling into the garage. They were all drawn to the sound of the running shower on the second floor eventually.

And after a slippery ascent, they each saw the bathroom frame blown outwards, some of the drywall bent in and droplets of moisture falling from the ceiling. The folding chair which had blocked the doorknob lay defeated underneath a pile of lather and wreckage, and overhead, a stringy piece of seaweed was pasted flat.

Finally, lying beside the end table that had been overturned, the radio still hissed and crackled with its battery encased within. In a yelping, fizzling tone, it kept trying to impart its praise to the captive audience that ceased to heed it.

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The title might worry you, but this certainly isn’t anything about watersports. Only lots of water. And I guess a mermaid too, because I fancied my second story with another half-human subject, “Out of Drought”, more than I imagined. I guess this can really be considered a continuation from that piece.

In all honesty, I was a little conflicted adding some “spiritual” themes to this story, but I stubbornly did it to give the right effect, hopefully. Whether that gets in the way of the real deal, which is a pretty straightforward belly inflation, I hope it’s fun to experience overall.

Thank you so much for reading.

[Project: “YOU VS. THE CENTER FOR ADVANCED CARE & THE SUN”]

