

The Seventh Secret

You're going on day two without showering. Twelve-year-old body odor is bad enough, but then there's Mom, who only bathes every couple days herself—the body is the temple of God, my beloved daughter; you've been eating peanut butter out of the jar and just *lying there* for an entire week, is this how God wants you to live? No, it isn't, go take a shower and wash that attitude off.

[The first secret: You're terrified of taking showers.]

You check to make the bathroom door is locked once, then again in intervals of thirty seconds as you peel off your clothes and drop them on the floor. There's a rhythm to it. Shoes aligned beside the floor vent (never over it). Jeans, underwear, socks, t-shirt, in that order. All this takes up two minutes and forty-seven seconds, so you turn on the water and rattle the doorknob until three minutes even. Get in the shower.

[The second secret: You managed not to look in the mirror during this entire venture. Looking in the mirror is vanity. Vanity is a sin.]

You keep your mouth closed tight as the water cascades over you. When you close your eyes, you imagine—

[The third secret: Scorpions. Scuttling up out of the shower drain like a reverse faucet. Little human heads snarling. Stingers glistening with water and soap. Clambering over each other in an effort to climb you, the naked sinner, so they can crawl into your mouth and down your throat, tear through your esophagus, gnaw away your muscle and bone until you're nothing but a pile of skin and hair and fat.]

—the apocalypse. Perhaps it's already started. Maybe the Rapture is happening right now but you don't know about it because you're in the shower. You could get out of the shower and

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go in the kitchen to find the shirt Mom was folding on the floor, go into Dad's study to see his shoes there without his feet inside them, look in each of your brothers' rooms and gloss your fingers over their empty unmade beds. You'd be alone until Jesus came back and sent you to Hell.

Soap goes on the washcloth, which goes on your body, which should hold the soap for exactly sixty seconds before you rinse it off. You are now clean, except for inside your ears and inside your mouth and inside your head and inside your entire body.

[The fourth secret: The inside of you will never be clean. Not really.]

Shampoo.

You hate this part because, once suds cover the larger portion of your head, the urge to check behind the curtain for demons hits you square in the chest. Now there's soap in your eyes. Seeing the doorknob alerts you to the possibility that a spirit may have unlocked it to let the scorpions in, so you squeeze most of the suds from your hair and dart out of the shower to check it.

[The fifth secret: You knew it would still be locked. You could see that it was locked from the shower.]

So you start back to finish rinsing your hair. Halfway to the shower, you catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror and stop.

[The sixth secret: You couldn't feel vain if you tried. Between the fog on the mirror and the soap in your eyes, you can only see yourself enough to know that you don't want to look any longer.]

Dripping wet, you turn off the water and finish rinsing your hair in the sink. After the little slip with the mirror, the scorpions won't feel so generous.

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[The seventh secret: You're still dirty.]

When you're done, you dry off. Put on your pajamas. Towel goes on top of your shirt on the floor.

Mom is in the kitchen. She glances over her shoulder when you walk in. That was fast, she says. You get clean?

Relatively, you answer as you open a jar of peanut butter.