

Toy Universe

by Jack Woods

She crossed the room to a tub in the center, the great woman with flowing locks of bronze, turning the taps until a heatless white became warm enough to bathe in. She added soap of some kind and the light became the bubbles, separating the surface from its room so she could hide her naked body beneath.

It was pointless, she thought, things were near invisible when bathed in light, but she always liked the foam. Watching it drip from her fingers into the bath as she played, creating squares and sometimes circles, like little endless worlds separate yet connecting back under the weight of gravity within the room. Toy universi, she called them, each one with different rules. She liked to be absurd; a rounded rectangle with the rule of triangles, imperfect hexagons following the laws of a line.

She once created a perfect sphere with four rules that reminded her of squares. She always remembered this one, her favourite, as it slowly dripped back to the tub yet somehow remained symmetrical, losing volume at no expense of shape. It fell between her fingers not in droplets but a perfect stream. She wondered if it were this connection that allowed it's perfect drain. She'd only made it once and endeavoured to one day make it again, but everything came out different, which she liked, but she couldn't win.

This bath, she thought, would be the one, where she created this world once more. So she carved out shapes and regions on foam letting light through the gaps to be sure. She carved out circles here and there waiting for the right time to pick them up, she'd cups her hands and hope again, but each time she failed to restore. The bubble always made the rules she could no longer control within, as soon as she lifted each one, they'd deform and collapse, until one sat perfect in eclipse.

This one had no leaks, sustaining its gentle self in her palm.

Longer than high, like a flattened sphere, it seemed to glow within. As each bubble inside slowly popped it became greater as it grew whole, until after a moment or two there sat a single bubble, and she was satisfied once more. She tried not to move it, in case she'd destroy this too, though she couldn't help but rotate it and see if everything inside was all she dreamed.

But from where she had removed it, her bath of light shone through. And everywhere she looked she only saw a glint of rainbow on it's edge, refracting between its soap-like ends, if it was hollow she never knew. Things like this happen once, she thought, so I'll hold it while I can. But whatever within seemed to grow again, and its weight grew heavier too.

It expanded for a while and she was careful to hold it still, until her arms were as wide as they may go, so she carefully placed it on her shoulders and made sure the bath's light could warm it too. But soon she grew quite wrinkled, and the water made of light now cold. She needed things to end, to live her life again. The bubble felt frozen, the light beneath her too, so she pulled the plug and drained the light, and on the porcelain she placed her world. It'll be alright, she thought as she watched it rest careful on the cold stone tub. She dried herself and briefly saw inside at last was dark.

She went about her day and didn't bathe again for weeks, but every morning she checked her bubble, still safe and growing with glee. Until one day she came back and saw it had grown around the room. No longer an eclipse but filling all gaps, deforming, pressing itself against the walls with nowhere else to go. Tomorrow she'd warm it up she thought, let in some light and maybe climb inside, if the bubble could let her through.

The next day she woke, prepared her food and went to the bathroom excited, but as she opened the door she heard a pop and knew. The bubble had grown so big it tried to leak through every crack and door, and her very act of opening it broke its fragile bubble wall. The room was a mess, tiny foam bits covered everything, so she got her mop and cleaned it up, ready to bathe in light again.

