The Explosion

At the time it seemed a sensible thing to do. If I am being completely truthful I don't think I even considered whether it was sensible or silly: I just did it. I was six.

Leaving a six year old in charge of her own ablutions is a brave piece of parenting. Most parents have to spend a good deal of time and energy cleaning their off-spring: running bubbly baths, sculpting soapy hair-do's into Mohicans, checking that teeth have been cleaned and toes dried carefully. What a bore. Why not send them upstairs for a 'lick and a promise' and assume that appropriate pieces of flesh are being scrubbed, wiped and wrapped up in dressing-gowns? That's what mine did one summer when grown-up traumas meant children had to take care of themselves.

Looking back it strikes me that this may have been foolish. My milky white teeth survived those weeks of neglect as did my cherubic face and twinkly toes but I do wonder if friendships may have suffered as a result of the interesting aroma that must have accompanied me around the playground. Oblivious to any olfactory effrontery I may have been causing, I happily played by myself imagining myself as the heroic but downtrodden lead part in twenty minute epic sagas, every breaktime.

Instead of washing I chose to create. In days when all adults used hairspray, even dads, hairspray lid tops made excellent crucibles for exotic experiments. With the door safely locked and the tap pouring precious water down the plug-hole as a cover, I would mix, stir, knead and poke around at potions created from every face-cream, body lotion, talcum powder I could find in the cupboard behind the mirror or under the sink or around the bath. No expense was spared. It didn't matter how small the pot of wrinkle cream, how luxurious the bottle of bubble bath, I would purposefully add it to me concoction and observe the result.

Each night the mixture grew and changed. Sometimes an adult voice would ask at the door if everything was alright, sometimes a younger sibling would beg to be allowed to use the toilet. They would all have to wait.

Once the nightly ritual was complete the precious little pot would have to be returned to its secret hiding place. The airing cupboard sat stony-faced in the corner of the bathroom, watching my antics no doubt with disapproval and disdain. Of course it would have seen worse in its time but such wanton waste must have irked its sense of right and wrong: a bathroom is a place for cleansing, not playing. I'd gingerly open the concertinaed doors and brave the cobwebbed water tank to hide it as far back as I could reach. Shut the door firmly, turn off the tap, unlock the door and skip stinkily across the hall to bed.

Of course I was discovered. The explosion could be heard three doors down. It was hell. I kept my nerve. I'm lucky no one sniffed me or my cover would have been blown.