

Ernesto Bones at 10pm Jane Withers

But would he have her back? Go through it all again and risk losing her once more? Not when he had all this. Alone in his study, the single light enveloping him in warmth, safe with memories that could not hurt him now...

Bones was distracted by the sound of water. He had had planned to leave his inaugural bath to last thing, but the day had been so unexpected he longed for soporific watery distraction. He looked wistfully at the shiny orange make-up bag with the big white Mary Quant flower. There were reminders of her speckled around the bathroom.

Bones tried to occupy himself by imagining an ideal bathing companion. He tried choosing them according to mood. Combative, erotic, philosophical, epicurean, loquacious, he ran through a long mental list: Genghis Khan (too quarrelsome), Anita Eckberg (most satisfying), and the lady he had seen sweeping the stairs (Bones wondered what was behind that grumpy pout). But it didn't work; he couldn't banish *her* from his mind.

Irritated, he immersed himself instead in the practicalities of the bath. He tried concocting a recipe for a transcendental bathing experience. It began with the water. He dreamt of having his own hot spring - he would call it Ernest-eau. Or perhaps soft rainwater collected from the roof, heated over a stove and afterwards cleansed and fed back to the vegetable patch.

Next, the tub. The standard cast iron bath with its tall narrow slippery sides reminded him uncomfortably of a sarcophagus. He imagined running the large brass tap until water flooded the almost cubic bathroom to waist height. Then he really could float freely ...

Bones added more and more hot water until the temperature was flesh curdly hot and stayed soaking until it became almost unbearable. He had heard a Japanese expression: 'Yudedako' or 'boiled octopus'. It describes the livid pinkish brown hue of the bather's flesh at that combustible moment when steamy heat conspires to relax the muscles and free the mind – the bather's idea of nirvana. This put him in a calm frame of mind to face the last great task of the day...