

Light

The first thing Sarah realized when she woke up was that the lamp was on. The second thing she realized was that she had turned it on herself, in her sleep. Had in fact gotten out of bed, walked across the room, and pulled the chain as if she possessed every lucidity about what she was doing.

“That’s weird.”

She slipped out of bed and pulled the chain again, noting as she glanced out the window that it must be about four o’clock in the morning. She never brought her alarm clock to her parents’ house—the red digits clashed with the faded 1930’s wallpaper; the noxious beeping at 5:30 in the morning seemed to give the whole farm a headache; none of the town’s radio stations came in clearly here. So having caught just the frigid beginnings of the sun’s ascent over the Montana skyline, Sarah deemed it early enough to crawl back into the old bed and sleep a bit longer...but while the will was there, the action was not forthcoming. All the guests had left, Mother had changed the linens in every bedroom but Sarah’s, all the food was tupperware and fridging. There was nothing left to do but go on with life. To sleep in. To milk cows and collect eggs and fix the leak under the kitchen sink.

Go to sleep, Sarah.

But she wouldn’t. She lay there and listened to her mother climb the steps. The familiar weight making the familiar creaks, so independent from Father’s heavy, buoyant *cracks!* She inched Sarah’s door open, saw she was awake, and came and sat at the foot of her bed, smiling sadly. They shared the pre-rooster silence for a while that way. Eventually, the sun broke, and Sarah’s mother gazed out the window. Sarah fancied that her mother wasn’t thinking anything but how lovely the sunrise was. Sarah was thinking of the lamp.

“Mom?”

Mother turned her deep eyes to her daughter, and listened.

“What was the last thing Dad said to you?”

She looked down and smiled. “He said what he always said before he travelled anywhere:

“Leave a light on for me.”