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Early Morning

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Early Morning

She shuffles into the kitchen and tries to massage the fitful sleep from her temples. She sighs when she sees a package of bacon on the table. How long has that been sitting out? Such a waste.

She grabs a mug from the cupboard, fills it with tap water, and pours it into the Keurig Mini her daughter insisted she buy.

Her finger hovers before the Brew button.

She doesn't remember leaving bacon on the table last night. She doesn't even remember buying it.

She turns and stares at the bacon. She approaches it, as if it could explode any second. She picks it up. Cold. It hasn't been sitting out all night. It was either pulled out of the fridge or just brought into the house.

Which one was it?

Karen shouldn't be in town; she would've called first. And Robert's been dead for five – no, six – years.

Was she sleepwalking in the early morning and gathering ingredients for breakfast?

She checks the front door. Locked. She glances at the back door.

Unlocked.

A squatter? A squatter wouldn't move in his own groceries, right where the homeowner could find them.

A confused neighbor? But her key wouldn't work, so she'd realize she was standing in front of the wrong house.

Her pulse quickens, like a woman in heels pattering after the bus.

Where's her phone?

She hurries back to the bedroom, her eyes sweeping from left to right. She reaches for her phone.

Thump. It came from the kitchen.

Her breath shutters from her mouth far too loudly – she can't remember how to unlock this thing. Her thumb, right? But the phone falls to the floor before she can do anything.

"Hello?" A voice calls.

She freezes. She hears footsteps.

A quick knock before the door opens.

A woman stands in her doorway. The woman's wearing blue scrubs. The woman smiles.

"Good timing, Martha. I'm just about to start making breakfast."

The woman disappears into the kitchen. Martha follows her. Bags of groceries sit next to the package of bacon. The woman glances into the empty cup still sitting in the Keurig.

"You making coffee?" the woman asks.

Deborah. The caregiver's name is Deborah.

"Oh," said Martha. "Yes, I forgot."

About Allee Mead

Allee Mead is a web writer at the Rural Health Information Hub and PhD candidate at the University of North Dakota. Her short story "Recuerdos" was published in the 2015 issue of *Prairie Winds* literary magazine.