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Sleeping with the Lights On

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Sleeping with the Lights On

By: Mara Bahmer

The first night you weren't here
I fell asleep with the lights on
I thought maybe if I stayed up long enough
You would walk through the door
But eventually night slipped into dawn
And my eyes grew too heavy to hold open

The second night you weren't here
I knew you were gone
But I left the lights on anyway
Because you liked to be the one in charge of turning them off
I would always wait for you to flip the switch
Before I let myself close my eyes
And then you would kiss my cheek and curl up next to me
I fought like hell to keep my eyes from closing
But I fell asleep with the lights on again

The third night you weren't here
I almost turned the lights off
Because I thought that maybe it would make you angry
Angry enough to march down from heaven and tell me with a huff
"That's *my* job."
But though my fingers brushed against the switch
I couldn't bring myself to flip it
Because I shouldn't be the one turning the lights off
You should

The fourth night you weren't here
My neighbor knocked on the door
And told me the light from my room was bothering her
And though she threatened to call the police
I refused to turn them off
I told her that you were just late and insisted
That the lights had to remain on until you arrived home

The fifth night you weren't here
A policeman came by the house
He awkwardly scratched behind his ear as he asked me
To turn the lights off
I took a deep breath, tears dripping from my bag-lined eyes
And I told him I couldn't
I thought he would tell me I was crazy
(You certainly would have if you were there)
But instead he gave me a look that told me he understood

He offered to turn them off for me
And I was so surprised that I nodded, letting him into the house
I lead him to my room and watched him nervously
As he approached the switch
I expected him to flip it immediately
But he didn't
Instead his finger lingered on the switch just as mine had two nights before
He looked at me with pain-filled eyes and murmured
"I lost a son too."
And then with a small click
Your light was gone