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When I Wake Up

by Jane Figgess

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. Classic FM burbles in the background so I must've slept through the radio alarm. I imagine her in the garden pulling weeds. I'll be the lazy one again. Faintly, from downstairs, I hear voices. Suddenly, I sit bolt upright. It's the postman and she's taken in the parcel, isn't in the garden after all. Today of all days I oversleep.

"What is it, darling? Were you expecting anything?" I ask casually, sprinting down the stairs as she turns from the front door, Amazon parcel in hand. She's still in her nightie, although also wearing leggings and boots. I've got used to this sort of thing.

"Another one!" she says, staring at me. "Open it. Now."

This is unusual.

"OK." Play for time.

The bell rings and we turn to open the door latch at the same moment, our fingers tangling.

"Mr and Mrs Norman?" A battered yet assertive man addresses us. A teacher, I surmise.

But all we can do is stare at our teenage son at his side.

"James?" I say, softly, so as not to alarm the fat snake emerging from his mouth. Meanwhile, his school trousers hang in tatters around legs twisting into tree trunks.

It's now clear to me that I'm the head of this household and I must speak to the boy as my father talked to me.

"So now you know your true self, son. I thought you had longer, till you were fifteen, but you're an early developer." Pride puffs my chest.

My wife laughs before vomiting into the daffodils. The teacher faints. James looks triumphant, the snake endlessly pouring from his mouth, rearing its head high above the house.