

Bird
Angela Johnson

I've been eating off their unfinished breakfasts for about three weeks now and they don't even notice it. They don't notice that somebody's been in their house either.

I am somebody else when I'm in their house.

I am not the wild-haired girl who ran so far away from everybody else she knew. I am not the hungry girl who sneaks food out of strange people's houses and hides during the day, but prowls around at night (even though she's afraid of the dark). I am somebody else when the farmhouse family has gone away.

I am the girl who walks across the creaky hardwood floors that shine like puddles in the sunshine, and lies across the soft couch with the quilt thrown on it. I make sure to say hi to all the family pictures, and I laugh at how the farmhouse daddy always wears big hats and turns his head weird.

I'm also the girl who sticks her feet in the bathtub and scrubs up as good as she can as fast as she can. But that's going to change today. Today I'm going to take a whole bath, bubbles and all, in the farmhouse family's nice white tub.

Everything that's wood shines in the living room and smells like lemon polish. I can see my reflection in all the furniture. Mom makes our furniture shine like this. She'd smile into her reflection sometimes and would hold the polish up to me like she was interviewing me for a TV show.

More reason for a bath: Water makes me happy when I'm sad and thinking about Mom.

I walk up the stairs, running my hand along the nice white walls and looking at all the family pictures that hang along the staircase. Everybody in this farm family smiles.

Even the people in the old black-and-white pictures smile.

My people don't smile.