The Hallway Light

At Belén's house, Christmas ended when her father turned off the hallway light. That was the signal to get up from the couches, gather the wrapping paper, and say goodbye. He always stayed behind to lock up.

The first year she hosted it at her place, her father came early and fell asleep in his jacket. After midnight, Belén saw everyone looking for their shoes. “Go ahead, I'll take him home,” she said, and waited for them to leave.

Her father woke up when she came back from the gate. He looked at the clock and asked whether she'd turned off the light. Belén went over to the switch. She already had her hand raised when he asked if there was any coffee left.

The hallway light reached the table from a distance. They drank their coffee out of the last two cups nobody had cleared.