



2021

The Morning After

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Recommended Citation

Edison, Matt (2021) "The Morning After," *Floodwall Magazine*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 40.
Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/floodwall-magazine/vol2/iss1/40>

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The Morning After

She knew it was too early because he wasn't even awake yet.

She leaned against the kitchen counter, dicing tomatoes and scraping them off a plastic cutting board into a frying pan. The coffee pot gargled and the overhead light buzzed. She froze when she heard a clicking sound behind her but shook it off when the fridge kicked on. She grit her teeth and shoved a knife through an onion. She put the blade down and cracked two eggs into a bowl and whipped them with a fork until tiny bubbles formed around the edges. From down the hall she heard the bed creak. She held her breath and the swelling around her eye throbbed.

Her phone was at the very end of the counter to her left. The only entrance into the kitchen was behind her. It led to the hall, which led to the bedroom on the left and the living room on the right. There weren't any windows. She left the fork in the bowl and grabbed the knife and chopped the onions thinner than she preferred. She heard the bedroom door open. She adjusted the heat on the grill. She heard the approaching crunch of feet against stale carpet. She kept her back to the kitchen entrance. The footsteps stopped.

She kept her head down but eyed the reflection in the toaster. He was leaned against the doorway behind her and staring at the refrigerator. He adjusted a photo on the fridge door — a picture of him and his friend Mark in Afghanistan, held in place by a tiny Marine Corps magnet. Just as she started to wonder if he was ignoring her, he turned his head. Her eyes darted back to the onions.

“Morning.”

“Hey.”

She kept her back to him and felt light-headed. She took in a quick breath as quietly as she could.

“Can they see you today?” she asked.

“They don't open for another hour.”

“What time?”

“Just after seven I think.”

“No, when do they open?”

“Oh, eight I think.”

She heard him drag a chair out from under the table and take a seat. She checked the reflection but couldn't see him. She tightened her grip on the knife and looked toward her phone.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“You promised me.”

“I know babe. They open soon.”

“Can they see you today?”

“I don't know. They get busy.”

“Do they take emergencies?”

“It's not an emergency.”

“It's not?”

The chair dragged across the linoleum. She checked the reflection but still couldn't see him. She didn't realize she had stopped chopping and had tightened her fingers across the handle. She couldn't hear him anymore but knew he had to be in the kitchen still. Wouldn't she have heard the callouses on his feet tapping against the floor though? Unless he was wearing socks.

Suddenly he was right behind her.

He draped his hands over her shoulders. Her blood stopped flowing. She bit her lips tighter together and felt dizzy. Her grip felt suddenly weak and she wondered if he could feel the sweat through her shirt. She told herself to remain perfectly still. She felt his breath against the back of her head — it smelled like whatever he had the night before and made her even more light-headed.

“Lots of guys have to wait forever, babe. There was that one guy who killed himself in the parking lot because he couldn’t get an appointment, remember?”

“That’s not funny.”

“I’m just saying. There’s lots of guys worse off who still have to wait.”

“Can’t you tell them what happened? Wouldn’t they see you quicker?”

“That happens to lots of guys. I didn’t even know what happened until I woke up, babe.”

“Doesn’t make me feel any better.”

He rested his forehead against the back of her head and buried his nose in her hair. The muscles in her neck finally loosened as she tilted her head away from him, taking the opportunity to adjust her periphery. She watched him lean back. His eyes were beet red. She could see him biting the inside of his lip. He let his hands slide off her shoulders and took two steps back.

“I’ll call at eight and tell them it’s an emergency.”

“Okay.”

“It won’t happen again, babe.”

“Okay.”

“Do you believe me?”

“Yes.”

He turned and left. She listened to the crunching of the carpet get quieter. She let out her breath and felt the countertop vibrate. She saw “Mom” flash across her phone’s screen, walked over, and hit ignore — seven missed calls in the last five minutes.

I’ll call back after eight, she thought.

About Matt Eidson

Matt Eidson is an author, journalist, and essayist pursuing his master's in English at the University of North Dakota, where he also works as a graduate teaching assistant. Matt is a former United States Marine with tours to Iraq and Afghanistan. He is also the current State Representative for District 43 in Grand Forks, North Dakota.