

The Wife

Maysen Matthews

Sleep eluded me last night. I stared up at the ceiling most of the evening. I had just drifted off to sleep, when the alarm clock started singing at seven. I wanted to stay in bed for just a few more moments but two things stopped me: knowing that I needed to get breakfast started for the children, and not wanting to spend one more second lying next to the man beside me.

I prepared a breakfast of oatmeal for the three older children, a bottle for my youngest, and a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs for Harry. Junior, Milo, and Joey sat at the table with their father and bowed their heads thanking God for the food they were about to eat. Not only is Harry a firm believer in prayers before meals, as am I, but he also ensures we thank God for President Kennedy. Only *He* really knows why, seeing as how Harry never had a nice thing to say about the man other than in prayer.

Harry leaves to take Junior to kindergarten, and himself to work after breakfast. I settle Grace down in her crib for her morning nap, and the two remaining boys play in their shared bedroom with their toys. Then I retire to my room and perch on the end of the bed.

Harry came home late last night covered in blood. There were times when he would come in with scraped and bruised knuckles, but never completely covered like he was. He told me about the man from the bar, how he did not mean to do it.

He told me not to tell.

I have been deliberating on it all night. I went to bed thinking I would have an answer in the morning, but here it is already 8:30 a.m., and I am no closer to knowing what to do now than I was when I fell asleep.

Should I tell?

No.

Harry is my husband and I love him. I've been with the man for eight years, and he has been so good to me. He is a hard worker and a great father. He provides for us and he loves the children. He loves me.

Yes.

Harry has a temper. He has never raised a hand to me or the children, he rarely even raises his voice, but... More than once Harry has been escorted home by an officer because he got too rowdy at the bar. More than once he came home drunk and spitting mad because someone said something he didn't like and he couldn't control himself. It was only a matter of time before he went too far, and last night it happened.

I lie back against the soft covers of the bed. Turning on my side I grab one of the pillows with the lace trimming around the case, and I pull it to my chest. Harry has a picture of me on his nightstand, and I have one of him on mine. Our shared dresser sits across from the foot of our bed and we have one of our wedding photos and a group picture of the children sitting atop of it. I was staring at our wedding photo before I laid down, and now I stare at my night table. At the picture of Harry dressed in his fatigues. I met him shortly after he came home from Korea. That is why he drinks.

I understand why he drinks the way he does. He was only eighteen when he went over there. He came back at twenty one injured and with a chip on his shoulder. That's how I met him, I was volunteering as a candy striper at the VA hospital he was in and we hit it off. I watched him work through his injury and the trauma of what he endured. I watched him leave the hospital and turn to drink to keep him from reliving his nightmares. He is a good man, he just needs the alcohol to take the edge off. I thought that after we had children he would slow down on his drinking, but he hasn't and now he has crossed a line he cannot come back from.

Sitting up I place the pillow back in its spot, and then I walk out of the bedroom. I peek in and check on the boys. They are rolling little toy cars along the carpet and making noises with their mouths, so I back out to check on Grace. She sleeps peacefully in her crib. Softly closing her door I make my way to the sitting room. Taking a seat, tears well in my eyes as I lift up the telephone receiver with a shaking hand.

“Hello, operator? Could you put me through to the police station, please?”