My Wife, on the Front Lines

Her silhouette shifts the shadows from the hallway until her navy scrubs come into view.

March 26, 2020 By Adam Hayden

Breathless.

What time is it? It feels early.

Are my contacts in? My left eyelid feels gummy.

I reach for my phone.

Thud.

It knocks the side of the wooden bed frame.

Hot breath. Humid. Which child is pressed against my back?

I reach and grasp for the wire of the ear buds and grip the thin rubber between my index finger and thumb, and I slowly pull the phone toward my body; deliberately; careful not to pull the ear buds from the plug on the phone.

5:22am.

I scroll notifications with my thumb and nudge the sleeping child toward the center of the bed. Eyes close, and I wake to hear her alarm sound. The gurgle of the coffee maker comes next. I slide from beneath the covers and tug the pillow to replace the form of my body beside the sleeping child.

I creep quietly to the kitchen, toward coffee and morning email.

Her silhouette shifts the shadows from the hallway until her navy scrubs come into view. I smell the daily lotion that lets me know she's close. Her hair is damp.

The metal tumbler rings as I bring her clean Yeti from the dish dry rack onto the cheap laminate countertop. I step to lean my slinking basketball shorts and thin butt against the sink and hunch over my phone with a warm glow illuminating my face. The warm mug radiating in the opposite palm.

Her lunch is packed with whatever leftovers we cobbled together from the previous day.

“We need to be more careful about wasting food, guys,” she scolded the boys the night before, “We’re entering a time when we may not be able to get as much fresh food.”

Her slip on sneakers for the commute to and from are kicked aside on the doormat inside the garage. They are not permitted to enter the house.

She leans in to kiss. Embarrassed by my morning breath, I nod my head low, and she kisses my forehead.

“Good luck today.”

She nods.

Then it’s later.

10:13am.

My phone dings from the charger. The younger two kids are running through the house, throwing pillows, and dragging blankets from each bed to a pile in the living room.

Another ding.

The text is from my wife, on the front lines.

I can’t wait for her to come home.

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