The Morning After

by idelthoughts

Summary

Forty-two years with her, and now she was gone. What was he supposed to do now?

Notes

This turned into a 3 part series with SpaceCadet72 - This is Henry’s part of the story of when Abigail left.

Henry hadn’t meant to fall asleep, but he’d exhausted himself in a high state of emotion. It overtook him as he lay with his arms wrapped around Abigail, whispering all his love for her into her ear, hoping some of it would make a difference, listening to her steady breath as she relaxed in his arms, exhausted herself.

His arms were empty now. He snapped upright, looking beside the bed. The suitcase was gone. That bloody suitcase, sitting next to them all night like an axe about to fall. The covers were rumpled next to him, the blanket tugged at an angle where she’d sat up and slid off the bed.

His heart pounded, his ears throbbing with the rushing pulse. No, she couldn’t have really meant it. She couldn’t really have left.

“Abigail?” he called.

No response. No no no...
The litany of denial started up, continuing until it was spilling out under his breath, a constant
muttering. He staggered from the bed, still in his suit from work the day before, when she’d told
him…told him…

“Abigail?”

He rushed down the stairs, hoping to find her still in the kitchen, still in the hall, still here
somewhere. He couldn’t have slept through her departure—it was impossible. He’d held her so
tight, been certain she couldn’t get away without him knowing.

He checked every room. For good measure he opened the front door and stood on the empty pre-
dawn street. Nothing—no taxi, no hints for him to pursue. She must have left as soon as he fell
asleep. Waited until his breathing evened out and his grasp loosened, and then left.

He sat down on the steps of their house, staring at the street, trying to get his mind moving.
Where would she have gone? Train, plane, bus, car? She loved trains, ever since their
honeymoon, had always talked of a cross-continental trip to California someday, though they’d
never gotten around to it. Perhaps the train station.

But no, she’d know he would think of it, and so she wouldn’t be so predictable. When she was
determined, she could always outsmart him and use his observations and assumptions against him.
She kept him guessing at every birthday, when she fooled him into suspecting one thing, and then
produced another.

He brought his feet up to a higher step and curled his arms around his knees, trying to out-think
both himself and Abigail, but a hard point against his thigh made him dig in his pants pocket for
the unexpected last gift she’d given him—the pocket watch. His pocket watch.

He was too numb to feel anything when he looked at it right now, except for the heavy tick,
familiar like the beat of his own heart. It meant something. It meant something big, but he was
too muddled right now to understand it.

He clicked open the pocket watch as he’d done hundreds of times in his distant youth. Just after
six in the morning, the sun not yet set to lighten the winter sky for another hour and a half yet. It
would take at least that long to either reach the train station or the airport—airport was his best bet,
yes—by which time a good chunk of the long distance flights would already have departed.
Abigail was no fool, she would have made certain he couldn’t follow her.

His stomach turned, and he was certain he would be sick. No, he was going to be sick.

He staggered upright and headed for the bathroom, gagging into the toilet until his legs shook. He
rinsed his mouth out and clutched at the sink, the heavy pocket watch still gripped in one hand,
hard between his palm and the tile of the sink top.

No. No, there was still a chance she was there, that he could catch her before she left. If he could
talk to her one more time, he could make understand this was a mistake, that this wasn’t necessary.
It didn’t have to be like this.

He tucked the watch back into his pocket and ran to fetch his shoes and jacket, and in a minute
was out the door and sprinting from their quiet residential side-street for the main street to hail a
cab. Even this early, there’d be one. He’d try the airport first; she hated planes, he would wager
it was the place she’d pick to throw him off.
The cabbie gave him cautious looks in the mirror the whole way as Henry tried poorly to keep his agitation under wraps at every red light and slow driver, until he threw a stack of bills at the man and raced into the terminal.

He had no idea where to go from here. He jogged along the ticketing counters scanning signs for departures, trying to think where she would go. Frankfurt? Amsterdam? London?

London. England—home. Would she? She’d left her family behind when his outward appearances had become too young to excuse, and she hadn’t gone on her own in over twenty years.

Twenty years ago, when she’d started looking at him and talking about how they were growing apart.

For twenty years these hints had been coming, and yet he’d never, ever believed she would truly leave. How could he even imagine it? He’d been with her so long he didn’t know how to picture the world without her at his side. Even the idea of it terrified him—nevermind this sickening reality he was suddenly facing.

Henry found the British Airways counter and made his way to the clerk. She was in the middle of tidying her station, not a person in line, and she looked up with a smile when Henry rushed up.

“When is the next scheduled flight for London?”

“No until this evening, sir.”

He felt his stomach rising again, and he swallowed it down fiercely.

“When was the last departure?”

“An hour ago.” Her eyebrows had drawn together in concern. “Are you alright, sir?”

An hour ago.

What should he do? Get on a plane, pursue her to her family’s door? If she were there, how did he explain the un-aged visage of their son-in-law, whom they had not seen in decades, to her family? At this point he didn’t care, he’d knock down the door to get to Abigail, to try and win her back, consequences to himself be damned.

But what if she wasn’t there? These were all guesses. There were no guarantees.

“Do you have a passenger manifest from the flight?” Henry asked urgently. “Can you tell me if an Abigail Morgan was onboard?”

The flight attendant folded her hands on the desk and glanced to the side, towards the booth next to her. The woman standing there was watching the exchange, and after a look between them, she returned her attention to Henry.

“I’m sorry, sir, I can’t give out that information. Maybe if—”

“My wife. She’s my wife. Can you tell me if she was on the flight?” Henry tapped his finger on the counter, emphasizing his point. “I need to know if she was on the plane or not!”
The clerk took a step back from the counter, and only now did Henry realize his voice had risen. He raked his hands through his hair and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

“I’m—I’m sorry,” he said through clenched teeth. “I just need to know.”

The clerk was mute, her eyes large.

“I think perhaps you should go, sir,” the woman next to her said, stepping over from her counter. “We can’t help you.”

“Yes, right. Yes,” Henry stuttered.

He back-pedalled as the two young women watched him cautiously, turning from the counter and walking away quickly. He needed to collect himself, to think. Why couldn’t he think?

What did he do now?

He wandered the length of the airport, trying to find a course of action that made any sense. If he had his passport with him, he could have bought a ticket and gotten on the next flight. But what if she was headed somewhere else, what if she wasn’t even on a plane at all? What if she hadn’t left New York? Would she really give up her whole life here just to get away from him?

She would. She’d given up her life over and over again for him, letting him haul them around the world on the mad crusade of keeping him from being exposed. She knew exactly how to leave and never be found. Together they’d worked out all the details of disappearing over the years, turning it into an art, a family of expert ghosts.

If she didn’t want him anymore, she’d never be found.

He startled as a hand fell on his shoulder. A security guard was hovering behind him, broad and sturdy and serious.

“Do you have a flight today?”

Caught deep in his thoughts, it took him a moment to dredge up an answer.

“No. No, I don’t.” He tried to shake the man’s hand off, but instead the guard shifted his hand to close it around Henry’s bicep. He frowned. “Let go of me.”

“Okay buddy, it’s time for you to go home. Let’s take a walk outside.”

He tried to pull away, but the guard’s grip was firm, and when he tried to struggle too hard the man gave him a warning look and Henry subsided. He let the man shuffle him out the main doors to the sidewalk. With each step, the fight drained out of him until he was lagging behind, only the hold on his arm and the guard’s momentum moving him forward.

“You have your car?”

“Cab,” Henry muttered. He was exhausted. “I took a cab.”

The guard sighed heavily and dragged Henry towards the cab stand, knocking a knuckle against the passenger window of one, and then popped open the door. He was urged inside, and the guard leaned his head in to eye him one last time.
“You have money?” Henry nodded. “Okay, good.” The man’s face softened, and he reached in and patted Henry on the shoulder before withdrawing and shutting the door.

Through numb lips Henry gave his address and stared out the window as the cab moved and the city rolled past. An age later, or perhaps in no time at all, he was deposited at his doorstep.

He’d left the door open a crack. Henry pushed it open and it swung inwards. Nothing amiss; it was as he’d left it.

As she’d left it. Left him.

It was almost midday. He’d killed hours in traffic and wandering around the airport, and was no closer to solving the question of what to do.

Henry opened the drinks cabinet and poured himself a hefty glass of whiskey, gulping down a burning mouthful, hoping it would stop the shake in his hands, would soothe the violent edge of panic in his thoughts. He needed to think, he needed to calm down and think. If he could find her then he could talk to her, make her see reason.

He needed her to understand, if he could just talk to her, she would understand.

But they had talked; they’d talked and talked for twenty years, and neither of them had heard the other. She’d drifted from him while he’d tried to pull her back, and finally she’d drifted too far and cut the line between them. Just chopped it off, and like a phantom limb Henry still felt her here, her presence still real in the house, all the more palpable for the silence.

Henry swallowed down the rest of the drink and filled it again, the bottle clinking against the glass as his hand shook, and the whiskey spilled over his hand and onto the drinks cabinet surface. He cursed, scanning for a towel nearby but there was none, and in an abrupt fit of fury he chucked the glass at the wall. It shattered in an explosion of glinting shards.

Henry stared at it, at the mess of trickling liquid sliding down the wall, at the shower of glass littering the living room carpet. It would be hell to get all that cleaned up.

His keening registered externally as a noise ringing in his ears long before he realized he was making it himself, hands clutched tight across his chest, his back thumping against the cabinet as he sank to the ground.

This was too much. He couldn’t do this, couldn’t do it by himself. Forty-two years with her, and now she was gone.

What was he supposed to do now?

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