

The Morning After

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2025 Nonfiction Contest — 3rd Place

The night before I could barely keep my face above the mattress. With an ardent palm between the blades of my trembling shoulders they force my body to collapse onto overextended arms. Every noise I make feels like something is rattling loose in my head and their fingers drag trails of fire across my over-sensitive skin. I couldn't be certain then if I was about to vomit or cum but I can be now as I slump over the toilet. It's a lazy, dry heave from a stomach that hasn't endured a meal for days. Every time I retch I wonder if I had broken my nose earlier. The shaking has reached my hands, my voice, my eyes. We made plans to meet again as we laid together last night. I pray the bruises that formed overnight fade before then. My eye sockets feel hot and thick and I can still feel the burning in all the places their lips were last night. It's a lingering reminder of how they only seem to ask me serious questions when I can't run away. They laced their fingers around my stomach and asked *"Did you like that? Are you ashamed to admit it or trying to spare my feelings?"* And their arms tightened as I tried in vain to think above the way their breath smoldered on my neck. I spit blood and hope it's from biting my tongue and not something deeper in my sinuses. But my nose hadn't bled, not from the impact or the violence of the intervening hours. It was a whirlwind of feelings, pain and passion and nausea and ecstasy all escalating alongside each other. My emotions are less mixed now than they are outright conflicting, craving their arms wrapping around me again and simultaneously hoping they'll never find out how low I've fallen. The porcelain all around me is blazing cold on my bare skin, all white and fragile like I just fell to this realm. The nausea has subsided now, giving way to a sort of reverence. I can think of this as sacrifice. I can think of this as ablution. And for some reason, this steels my resolve to suffer through the weekend. I'm saving my final dose for Tuesday

morning so when the time comes I can convince my eyes to focus
as I look them in the face.

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