

Staci Burkel
July 2016

Assignment #1:

As soon as the sausage would start to sizzle on the pan, my sleeping nose would start dreaming of my favorite breakfast. As a person who dreams every single night, the things I dream during the night almost always play out for me the next day. Biscuits that are practically falling apart in front of my eyes. Looking like a pot of gold, the yellow biscuits sit and stare at me as they cool off on the top of the oven. My father always slightly undercooks them so that they can sit on the pan and brown to a flaky golden crisp. As if they're too pretty to look at, the biscuits always hide under a hand towel playing peek-a-boo with me like a little schoolgirl hiding from her friends. Just as my eyes lock in on the golden treats, the crackle of the pan focuses my direction back to the star of the show—my grandpa pap's famous Biscuits and Sausage Gravy breakfast. Just as I was preparing my plate, I heard the screaming. "Staci! It's ten 'til nine! Get up NOW!" My eyes opened and I was nestled in my bed soaked in my own mouth-watering drool. I wiped my mouth and sprung out of bed in an instant to race down the hallway. Heading left and around the staircase, my socks caught feel of the fluffy Webkinz pug dog on my hardwood floor and my feet flew out from underneath me. I crashed to the ground in an instant.

"That hurt..." my mother said with a loving grin. "You know, those silly Webkinz belong in those storage containers for a reason!" She uttered.

"Mom with 76 of them, it's hard to store them all! My mom always supported whatever hobby I was into, and this one was just a little out of hand—and even I knew that. But that never stopped me from collecting the newest 5-10 plush toys every time I would go to the store. I threw my Pugsley Webkinz back in my room and started again for my jackpot. As I flew down the stairs and did a big JUMP down the last three stairs, I was only steps away from my favorite breakfast in the world.

"Time to eat!" My dad exclaimed. Like Pavlov's Classical Conditioning theory, those three words, when combined together, made my mouth water immensely. My plate was already dished out and was staring up at me ready to be eaten. I tore apart my steamy biscuits and threw them in my sausage gravy. Hands moist and hot, I sluuurrrped my fingers and went back to preparing my feast. As I reached for the salt and pepper, my mom grabbed my hand and sent me to the kitchen to wash my hands. "Was I EVER going to get to eat?" I thought to myself desperately.

I ran towards the sink to wash my hands when something next to the sink caught my eye. I knew this sight too well. Inside the see-through plastic container, sat my favorite treat in the world. Two rows of five, were the most marvelous cookies of all time, perked up on one another like they were proud of themselves. Ten moist and soft white sugar cookies paired with a huge dollop of Lofthouse's famous

white frosting and decorated with rainbow sprinkles danced at me, taunting me to break the large sticker seal. Mom and dad had both, individually done it again.

Assignment #2:

“You know there are plenty of guys out there, Bea. You don’t have to turn to Match.com so quickly!” Jen snarled.

While she was indubitably my best friend, she always had to throw in that motherly judgment right before she would whisk me out the door to chase after another “internet man,” as she would call them. I am a hopeless romantic... with a strong emphasis on the word “hopeless.” It seems that I am the only woman in this damned world with enough wit to see through the bad guys. Jen says that I just don’t give each new guy a fair shot. But who could blame me? After being physically shoved to the ground by the only man I had ever loved, loving someone else seemed nearly impossible. I’ve always been one to judge a book by its cover—and first impressions will either make or break the deal.

As I walked in to the only nightclub in my small town of Seymour, Indiana, I scanned the room for the tall, dark, and handsome Internet man that the ‘site depicted. The bar was more crowded than normal, so I made my way over to the bar. Rob, my favorite bartender, made eye contact with me and acknowledged that I wanted “the usual.” I’m not ashamed that I was a regular at this club, besides the fact that the other regulars would place bets on my odds of my date of the week. The guys would let out a loud cheer towards whatever game was on the big screen if this date’s odds were in my favor and if they weren’t, the men would wait patiently to further judge the scenario.

Just as my double shot was mid-swallow, a tap on my left shoulder surprised me enough that I immediately choked on the whiskey and coughed some of it up. The men around the bar cheered loud and proud as my face blushed. I shook the Internet man’s hand and wiped up the Jack from my silky turquoise blouse. Did those cheers mean a good night was ahead of me? Or were they just stoked to see me choke?

Louie winced and joked that a woman shouldn’t ever drink like a man. “Oh great... Another one of these guys. Can’t I ever find a guy impressed with my impeccable taste in Whiskey?” I thought to myself. As the small-talk started, I knew my wing-woman, Jen would be waiting by the phone for my cue.

I pretended to feel my phone buzz and I apologized for reaching for it, hoping the Internet man would excuse me to take the fake phone call. Just as I was suspected, he encouraged me to take the call and told me to take my time. With Jen on speed dial, I pretended to sound taken back by the news I was receiving on the other end. As soon as Jen answered, I worked in our agreed-upon signal—the address of the bar—and settled in to wait for the rescue.

With the look on Louie’s face, I could tell he caught on to my dirty lie. He mumbled the strangest things off in a hushed voice. He explained that he’d always loved women, especially his mother, and that he’d never ever raise a hand

to her, even if she had endured that kind of treatment in the past. “I believe men and women are equals,” he said. “I mean, women can have babies, which makes you all different, but we’re basically all the same otherwise.”

How did this fool somehow put his finger right on my two biggest fears? Within minutes of meeting, he had spoken of both of my top worries—physical abuse and having children. Was he getting back at me for ditching the date? There’s no possible way he knew that I couldn’t have kids and even more importantly, he mustn’t know that the fighting and my disease led to my last divorce. My stomach dropped to the floor and tears rushed down my face. I was again, feeling alone and *hopeless*.

Assignment #3:

It was a day like any other day when I got the call from my mother. I was in a lecture in my second year of college at THE Ohio State University. As a biomedical engineer, I was taking a tough course on something involving science. The professor had a strict “No Cell Phone” policy that was always tough for us to follow. When I felt my phone buzz, I ignored the phone until the third buzz went off—letting me know it wasn’t social media, a text, or an email, but it was a phone call. I ignored it. “Probably nice that I have my class as an excuse,” I thought in the moment. I was never a big talker. I would much rather send a text behind a screen than to face the dreadful conversation of whatever family member missed me.

It wasn’t that I didn’t miss them—which I did so damn badly. My family was practically all I thought about besides the labs I was in or the beer I would drink that weekend.

This is supposed to be what college is like, right? Beer and studies? No one else missed their family—enough to talk about at least.

After the buzzing seized, I took a sigh of relief and dove back into my book. When the buzzing returned, I rolled my eyes and took out my BlackBerry to see who it was and what the hell they needed this early in the morning.

It was my mom. And my sister.

Finally, a text rang in from my girlfriend.

“Something terrible has happened to your pop. Call home as soon as you can.”

The text read and my heart dropped to my feet.

“Uhm, Tyler. Do you have something you would like to share with the class?” My professor called out to me among the group of 40 in the room.

“No, sir. Nothing to share,” I mimicked, panicking at what could be wrong.

“Well unless someone has a *dying* need to be reached, your cell phone is going with me.”

I couldn’t get over the way he said “*dying*...” was he mocking me? Was my dad *dead*?!

Those next 35 minutes were the longest minutes of worrying I have ever

endeavored.

Assignment #4:

It all started a few weeks after I moved into the new neighborhood. It was a quiet street, not much different from any other I had lived in. The women would walk across the street to snoop around. See who the new family was, to have something new to discuss with the other women at their weekly book club gatherings, I perhaps. They would strut across the street with their painted faces and gleaming smiles. One geared with a roast, the other with a pie.

As we would every time we moved, the kids would pile downstairs at the ring of the doorbell, waiting to introduce themselves. Holding the “stay at home” role, I would be forced to go into our personal lives explaining how my husband’s job title would change at the drop of the hat and how we hoped this time would be different.

It wouldn’t be. The kids would settle into their classrooms, forcing into friend groups and longing to move back to the last “home” that they had just recently adjusted to. It was no fair to them—or me for that matter, but they were used to this lifestyle and we did what we could at the time.

I promised the kids a great weekend to come. It was their first weekend at the Green Springs neighborhood and I promised them that this time would be different.

As Saturday morning rolled around the corner, the kids filed into the van and we headed four streets down to the neighborhood pool. I had the urge in my veins that this time *actually would* be different. Was I doing so well at convincing the kids that I was now reassuring myself? I shook the feeling off my shoulders as we rounded up the sunblock and towels.

The kids coated up in the white gloss and munched on a cheese pizza as the ‘block sunk in to their pores. Out of nowhere, the whistles rung and I shot up out of my seat. I looked around, noticing that the other mothers expected this to be a drill. My heart dropped and my eyes darted around the scene, knowing that one of my four was surely not around. I darted towards the pool, the hot cement racing through the heels of my feet as my shoes shot out from under me.

Without thinking, I dove into the pool searching relentlessly for my little one. I turned left, then right, eyes focusing on the orange shorts that would be fighting for his breath.

I caught glimpse of them, probably 450 feet away. My legs shot out and kicked harder than they ever have before. Submerged under water, I took a deep breath and flapped my arms relentlessly in search of my baby boy.

As soon as I felt his skin under my palms, we shot up to the surface of the water. I had him.

It was only then that I realized the look of astonishment from the crowd—my son was fine.

My little Crue had only probably been in the water for 40 seconds, enough for him to waddle to the other side of the concrete and jump in towards the floating ring, descending slowly to the three foot maximum that was beneath him.

“Did you just breathe under water?!” I heard shrieking at me from all sides of the pool.

Welcome to the neighborhood, super woman.

Assignment #5:

It was a Tuesday night when my parents told us they would be leaving for the weekend. We were eating mother’s famous lasagna for dinner at the table when she broke into the news. The silver tools were clanking loud against the pearly white plates. The sound of mouths munching in accordance to the clanking ‘ware meant that mother’s meal was prepared to a tee. Across the room, the mounted home phone let out its scream that made us all jump a little, our eyes darting around at each other in unison.

“Ah agh! No one is excused until we are all finished. Who the hell calls at dinner time, anyways?” Mother exclaimed. “So... Your father and myself are going to be leaving this weekend. It’s our 23rd anniversary and he is treating us to a weekend away. Beth, you’re to attend your cheerleading practice Friday as usual. Have Maddie’s mom take you home, alright?” She looked at me with raised brows.

“Of course.” I answered. It took two more bites of lasagna for my nerves to set in. You see, mom and pop never left the house. Some of my friends were lucky enough to have over-working parents who were usually too tied up to have a single care about who came over or when. But having our parents out for even a couple hours was a treat in my family. Imagine the rush of excitement in learning that they were packing their bags for a whole weekend.

I tried to hold in my smile as I looked around at my older brothers to see if they had caught on. By the looks of their scraped empty plates, they were obviously running off to cook up something of their own. This one was going to be good. We excused ourselves one by one and rushed up to Tommy’s room to start cooking up a plan.

The boys are I mocked up a “weekend throw down,” as Dan named it. This included 2 ½ days of excessive rocking out, drinking, and throwing down. We had two full days to plan the best weekend of our lives.

Friday:

When school let out, I rushed off to practice, nerves rushing through my body. The

girls and I smiled from ear to ear at the fun that was yet to be. Dan was the oldest, and one of his friends had an impressive fake ID. We threw in all the cash we had and sent the friend to buy the largest amount of “the cheap stuff.”

By 8:30 p.m., the drum kit was set up, alcohol was chilled, and the teenagers started rolling in. Drinks were pouring hard. Kids were tossing mini balls in cups and the smell of cheap vodka filled my house.

Saturday:

The morning after, we rolled up to Waffle House half dead. The only recollections I have after the mini balls were of some shot game that was a race between teams of who could chug the most liquor. Who ever thought that was a good idea? The place was a mess. But we weren't stopping yet. The 'rents were set to roll in Sunday night at midnight so all of Sunday was devoted to recovering ourselves and my house.

By night time, the crowd was rolling back in. We slept the day off and recovered for an even crazier night to come. By 10:30 p.m., Dan started kicking people out. Some kid had a camera flashing and none of us knew him. By 11:30 p.m., I was found crying in the bathroom claiming that someone had taken my new stereo that was in my room. Hell if I didn't find it tucked away in my closet a week later. By 3 a.m., people were passing out on couches, bathrooms, and two of my friends were puking in the toilets.

Sunday:

We dragged ourselves out of bed and started scrubbing. Dirty shirts, purses, and even socks were found scattered around the most random places. My five girlfriends and my two older brothers were head to toe in cleaning gear. Scrubbing floors, carpets, and tabletops. We had just about had it scrubbed when the headlights came through the window. “They'reHERE” Wendy screamed out. “They can't be here. It's only 3o'clock!?” We yelled out. Nothing but a photograph of us rocking out on the drums, me as lead singer, was found in the corner. I grabbed the photograph that had appeared and darted up to my room, spraying Fabreeze in a trail behind me.