

Actions and consequences

“Okay princess, I really have to go now,” I expressed to my daughter with a stern tone. “But Daddy,” she repeated. “Please just play tea party with me for one more minute.” Glancing at my beeping wristwatch, two texts rolled in from my boss. “I’m sorry Liv, I have an important meeting, and I’m already late. I promise when I come back home we’ll finish.” Her expression didn’t shift. “I’ll even bring you strawberry ice cream,” I added. Jumping to her feet, she walked me out the door. A sweet smile pulled at the corners of her mouth. “I love you, Daddy,” she announced as she waved me off. “I love you more Liv, be back soon.” The blue Toyota truck rolled out of the curved driveway and slipped out into five o’clock traffic, just as the small face in the window appeared further and further away.

A cold wind rushed through the open window as my truck neared Lance’s, a popular and busy tavern. Knots had built up in my stomach. If this meeting went as planned, I’d be the next big-time editor gifted with his own office, and enough money to move out of his old dingy home. This raise was essential. My truck reached a stop beside the curb and the key turned in with a click. The ignition went silent, and I stepped down. Two minutes to spare.

Brushing by the server through the heavy brown doors, my gazing eyes spotted Chuck. My pace quickened as I approached him. His eyes lightened, the chair pushed back, and he stood up to greet me in a matter of seconds. The server strolled over to our table with a metal tray of fizzing beers. “You can just set those right here, thank you,” Chuck let out. “Hope it’s okay that I ordered you a tall one Mikey,” the man chuckled. How would I tell him I didn’t drink? No wasn’t an option. “No problem at all!” I beamed. My glass lifted from the table and poured a mouthful of cold ale into my mouth. Reaching for his glass, Chuck settled into his chair and started talking business.

An hour had gone by. My forehead was greeted by droplets of salty sweat, pooling from my hairline. Twelve glasses of Allagash lay empty on the small table. Six from me, six from Chuck. I didn't drink, but for some reason, I just did. My legs thrust my chair back, as they attempted to hold my swaying body upright. "Thank you for dinner Chuck, but I really should get going. I promised my daughter I'd play tea party with her before bed," I sighed. "Alright man, I'll call you tomorrow about the position. Drive home safe," Chuck let out with a soft expression. "Will do," I added. Stumbling out of the small restaurant, tables and chairs served to hold me steady. I didn't drink.

The truck lit up as the metal key inserted itself and turned forward. My foot reached for the gas and slowly pumped the pedal. The drive home was only fifteen minutes. I could do it. The circular volume dial turned all the way left, and the only noise heard in the car was my heavy breathing. Cars zoomed by on the freshly paved road in blurry yellow and white strains.

The dark sky became heavy with rainfall. Raindrops spattered against the windshield as the car struggled to hold onto the road. My eyes fought to stay open, and every move I made felt slow. The heavy truck shifted to the right with a gentle pull of my wheel, arriving at my street. A wave of relief washed over me as I pulled into the driveway. I made it back.

My eyes began to lose their focus. Blurry became blurrier, and my truck continued to move forward. Too spaced out and unaware, I hadn't noticed Liv bolt from the front door and out into the rain-filled driveway. Thrilled with my arrival, she stood patiently waiting in the driveway, but her giggles and excitement were not heard over the booming truck engine. Nearing the small but lively home, the blue truck lifted up and quickly back down. The short innocent scream ended abruptly. Silence. My eyes widened and a chill cursed through my trembling body. What had I just done?