

10 Reasons to Have a One-Night Stand

Surely nothing good had ever come out of a one-night stand.

Except in a one-night stand, you actually got to have sex. Which was more than I could say for myself right now. It had been twenty-nine days. *Twenty-nine days.*

Which would be okay if I were single. But I had a boyfriend. A live-in, sleep-in-my-bed boyfriend. That made the twenty-nine-days figure rather pathetic.

It wasn't helping that the headline '10 Reasons to Have a One-Night Stand' was splashed across the top of my computer screen. I stared at the words blankly, wondering if they were purposely taunting me. I didn't necessarily agree that there were ten or even five reasons that anyone should consider such a thing, but that wasn't the biggest problem.

It would be bad enough to be *reading* a self-esteem-stomping, flaky article about going out and getting laid by a random guy. It was worse when I was the one who had to actually *write* the article.

Besides, in my past experience, there was no reason in the world anyone should encourage that kind of thing. You always woke up the next morning with a hangover, dark circles under your eyes, and a strange guy in your bed who

was bound to mumble something like, 'You were great last night, Candi, baby,' when your name was clearly Claire.

I must have been mumbling my protests audibly, for Wendy, *Mod* magazine's assistant features editor, popped up over the wall of my cubicle, an eyebrow arched. The first time I'd laid eyes on her a year and a half ago on my first day at *Mod*, she had looked somewhat nondescript to me. Then she'd smiled at me for the first time, and I was nearly blinded by a seemingly endless display of pearly whites. I'd been powerless to keep from grinning back. If you put Julia Roberts's smile on a younger Kathy Bates's face, you'd come pretty close to approximating Wendy, who had quickly developed into my closest friend.

Since she had dyed her hair red, the latest in a bimonthly series of shades that had little to do with her natural color, she'd looked suspiciously like she was beginning to channel the hamburger queen who shared her name. Today I was momentarily distracted by the neon-green scarf she had tied around her neck, which seemed to have nothing to do with her fitted black tee from Nobu, one of New York's trendiest restaurants, or her pleated red schoolgirl skirt. But I'd long since given up trying to figure out Wendy's style.

'Problem?' she asked wickedly. I couldn't resist responding to her mile-wide smile. I grinned back.

She knew I was having a problem all right. I'd unleashed a flood of complaints this morning about *Mod*'s editor in chief, Margaret Weatherbourne, as the elevator whisked us silently up to the forty-sixth floor. Beneath her seemingly flawless Upper East Side exterior, Margaret had been a bit off-kilter since the release of the recent circulation figures that had put our biggest competitor, *Cosmopolitan*, at 3 million while *Mod* stayed steady at 2.6 million. She had been spotted more than once mumbling words that wouldn't befit her classy persona in the general direction of *Cosmo*'s offices eleven blocks up Broadway.

At our weekly editorial meeting on Monday, she had announced that this was war. If it was the last thing she did, we would beat *Cosmopolitan* in circulation next quarter.

So I suppose it shouldn't have completely blindsided me when she called me into her office at 6 p.m. last night to tell me she'd had a brilliant idea and wanted to crash the August issue with a story about how wonderful one-night stands were for a twenty-first-century girl's self-esteem. Apparently this would be a circulation-raising feat that would restore Margaret to the status of Supreme Fashion Goddess of New York.

'But they're *not* good for self-esteem,' I said flatly. The magazine was going to press on Monday morning, which meant that I'd have to turn around her latest ridiculous idea in less than forty-eight hours if I had any hope of having a weekend free from work.

Besides, I was just about the last person on the *Mod* staff who should be writing the article. Sure, I'd had my share of wickedly fun one-night stands in college but I'd like to think that at twenty-six, I was past that. Besides, there was the fact that I'd been dating my boyfriend, Tom, for over a year now. (Even if he didn't *technically* appear to be sleeping with me at the moment. I was convinced it was just a fluke, or maybe a phase.)

So what did I know about one-night stands?

It wasn't even my department. As *Mod's* entertainment editor, I was responsible for all of the magazine's celebrity profiles. But my reputation as the 'nice girl' had seemingly convinced Margaret that I would take on impossible projects without putting up a fight.

Note to self: Plan to reconsider reputation as the nice girl.

'Yes they are,' Margaret said. Her green eyes blazed, and for a moment I thought I would see fire shoot from her nostrils.

'One-night stands?' I asked finally.

'One-night stands,' she echoed cheerfully. She waved a

slender hand in the air with a dramatic flourish. ‘They’re so in. They give the woman the power.’ I grimaced. Like she’d know. The only thing that had given her ‘the power’ was that her mother’s fourth husband (whom she still called ‘Daddy’ – despite the fact that she was in her forties) owned Smith-Baker Media, *Mod*’s parent company.

‘Power?’ I repeated. I tried to think back to a time when one of my college one-night stands had made me feel powerful, but I was at a bit of a loss. Margaret glared at me.

‘Just do it, Claire,’ she said firmly. ‘The magazine is closing in four days, and I want this article in there. And you’ll write it.’ Before I could open my mouth to ask the obvious, she said with unmistakable finality, ‘Because I said so.’

That’s how I’d landed at my desk on a Thursday morning with a headache and a seemingly impossible task before me. The fact that I seemed to have no recent experience in the field of sex or anything sex *related* was only making matters worse.

‘That screen still looks pretty blank to me,’ Wendy said over the cubicle, winking at me as I slumped over my keyboard and banged my head against my desk. Wendy had wrapped August earlier in the week – we all had – and was already working on September. Other than the layout people, who were rushing at the last minute to include room for the one-night-stand article and splash a teaser for it across the cover, I was the only *Mod* staffer scrambling to finish up for August on such a tight deadline.

‘What can you say about a one-night stand?’ I moaned, rolling my eyes at Wendy. It was pretty much common knowledge that I was the least sexually advanced of anyone in *Mod*’s offices, due to an inexplicable dating drought B.T. (Before Tom). Wendy, on the other hand, was to sexual liberation what Manolo Blahnik was to shoes – a fearless leader and trendsetter, not to mention a face for a movement.

‘Oh, I could say plenty,’ Wendy said, tossing her red curls over her shoulder and readjusting her Day-Glo scarf.

‘I mean, *I* could go out and do field research. Think *Mod* would pick up the tab?’ She winked again at me. ‘In fact, I have a hot date tonight. Maybe I can test your theory then.’

‘A date? With a waiter?’ I asked innocently. Wendy nodded excitedly, and I rolled my eyes.

‘Pablo,’ she said, putting her right hand over her heart and doing a little twirl. ‘From Caffè Linda on Forty-ninth Street. He’s *so* sexy.’

‘You think anyone in an apron who takes your order and brings you food is sexy,’ I muttered, trying not to smile. Wendy laughed. Around the office, we called her a ‘serial waiter dater’, a title she wore as proudly as Miss America wore her crown. Wendy was an aspiring chef who was convinced that culinary greatness would one day be magically bestowed upon her if she ate out every night at Manhattan’s top restaurants, sampling the creations of the city’s best chefs.

As a result, she barely had enough money for rent and was in massive credit card debt, but she had an endless supply of waiters whom she somehow managed to seduce somewhere between her salad course and dessert. I still couldn’t figure out how she did it. I was thinking of asking her for lessons.

‘See, I’d be the perfect one to write this article,’ Wendy said. Well, I couldn’t argue there. ‘Hey, you can write me off if you want, but my first piece of advice would be to drop Tom and go out and do some field research.’ Wendy raised an eyebrow at me. ‘How often do you get to explain a one-night stand to yourself by saying that you just *had* to do it for work?’

‘You just want me to drop Tom,’ I said, wrinkling my nose at her. Wendy had never liked him. I trusted her – she was my best friend – but that didn’t mean she was always right. And even if she was getting laid a lot more than I was, I didn’t necessarily want to live like her, hopping from one man’s bed to the next in a dizzying array that read like a *Zagat’s* guide.

Although on day 29 of my inadvertent reborn-virgin status, I had to admit, there was a certain appeal to her dating philosophy.

My friends back home in suburban Atlanta, where I had spent my entire childhood, were marrying off left and right, and at almost twenty-seven, I was experiencing the first symptoms of feeling like an old maid. Of course by New York standards, I was years too young to worry about marriage. But by the standards of the South I was already over the hill, matrimonially speaking. At friends' weddings (which now seemed to take place on a bimonthly basis), I was already hearing the sad whispers and standing on the receiving end of the pitying glances reserved for the eternally unmarriageable.

I had confided last month to the most recent of my newly-wed friends that I thought Tom might be 'The One'. And I really did feel that way, don't get me wrong. After all, we were both writers, he made me laugh, we had lots of fun together . . . It seemed so logical.

Of course, this was mere hours after my mother had taken me aside and reminded me, 'Claire, you can't be too picky, you know. You're not getting any younger.'

Thanks, Mom.

'He doesn't even have a job,' Wendy said simply, snapping me out of the beginnings of a daydream about my own nuptials.

'He's writing a novel,' I said, shrugging with what I hoped looked like nonchalance. 'He needs the time to work on it. He's a really great writer, you know. He's always working really hard on it at home.'

Wendy sighed.

'And it's totally normal that he doesn't want to sleep with you?' she asked gently. As my best friend, Wendy had, of course, heard the full and unfortunate details of my dry spell.

'It's just a phase,' I muttered. 'Anyhow, I think maybe he has a sleeping disorder or something. I mean, he sleeps

all the time. Maybe it has nothing to do with me. Maybe I should suggest that he see a doctor.'

'Maybe,' Wendy said after a moment. She smiled at me mischievously. 'Or maybe you should just go out and test this one-night-stand theory.'

I rolled my eyes and turned resignedly back to the computer, trying to ignore her giggles. I gritted my teeth and tried to think about sex, which wasn't too hard, considering it had absorbed just about every one of my waking thoughts for the past few weeks.

By the end of the day, I had managed to dash off two thousand words that didn't sound much different from any of the nearly identical 'How to Please Your Man' articles we pushed on readers each month.

This isn't *exactly* what I visualized doing when I graduated from college. But thankfully, the atmosphere wasn't anything like that of the high fashion magazines where a few of my classmates from college worked. They had all been promptly assimilated and now had matching haircuts, matching Fendi and Louis Vuitton bags for every season, and wardrobes that consisted only of the most expensive and trendy designer clothes. Margaret just asked that we look presentable, polished, and stylish, which I usually didn't have a problem with, even on my admittedly meager salary.

After all, I had to look the part if I was going to interact with the fabulously wealthy A-list set. I'd made the mistake my first year at *People* of dressing professionally but without much of a stylish edge, and I'd quickly learned my lesson. Spending a bit more on designer items – even if I could afford just a scarf to pair with less impressive non-designer threads – would go a long way. When you were an actress decked out in tens-of-thousands-of-dollars of diamonds, strutting down the red carpet, there was just something about a reporter wearing a Gucci scarf that made you just a bit more likely

to stop and chat. Sad, right? But those were the rules of the game.

And the articles. Sheesh, the articles. Don't get me wrong – I love what I do. I love getting inside people's heads (even if those heads often belong to vacuous celebrities) and finding out what they're thinking, what they're worrying about, what makes them tick. So the job as senior celebrity editor of *Mod* fits me with a perfection that might surprise you, considering I originally had my sights set on the lofty literary world of *The New Yorker*.

But it's the other articles, the in-between assignments that a Prada-clad Margaret dumps on my desk at the last minute, that drive me crazy. I mean, there are only so many ways you can address your readers' 'Most Intimate Sex Questions' (clue: they're not so intimate any more when 2.6 million women are reading about them); the truth behind 'How to Drop Those Last Five Pounds' (um, exercise and eat less – duh); and the ever-popular 'How to Know If He Likes You' (well, men who like a woman usually want to sleep with that woman – wait, should I be taking notes here?).

I became an editor because I love to write. And I took this job at *Mod* because I really like one-on-one interviews and profiles. As a little girl, I loved reading my grandmother's celebrity magazines: *People*, *The Enquirer*, *Star*. The lives of the beautiful people in the pictures seemed so glamorous, so exciting. Perhaps that was what had drawn me to celebrity journalism to begin with, although after several years of working in the field, I knew better than to think that everything was as it appeared to be.

At *People*, where I worked before I started at *Mod*, I'd made a name for myself in the business by breaking two major stories in the same year: the biggest celebrity breakup of the decade, the split between movie star Clay Terrell and pop princess Tara Templeton (thanks to the friendly relationship I'd developed after numerous interviews with the down-to-earth Clay); and the story of

musical diva Annabel Warren's breast cancer diagnosis. (I had also interviewed her numerous times, so when the cancer rumors broke, mine was the only call she decided to take.) As a result, *Mod* had come looking for me. Margaret dangled a higher salary – and much more important, the chance to work on lengthy honest-to-goodness human interest profiles – and I was sold. And just like that, I became the youngest senior celebrity editor in the business.

I loved the job, but the move had made me some quick enemies. In the ever-gossipy world of magazines, a rumor had circulated (and lingered for six months) that I'd slept with Margaret's boss, Bob Elder, the president of Smith-Baker Media. Of course I hadn't, but professional jealousy tends to rage when someone several years shy of thirty snags a dream job that scores of women were after. I hadn't done anything wrong to get here. I certainly hadn't slept with Bob Elder, who was pushing sixty and was easily three times my weight. I had just done my job. And ironically, this wasn't *my* dream job at all, anyhow.

When I was an English major at the University of Georgia I wouldn't have suspected that four short years later, I'd be enthusiastically asking pop stars whether they wear boxers or briefs. Or asking actresses whether they feel like Sevens, Diesels, or Miss Sixtys lift their already-perfect butts better (as if Gwyneth Paltrow and Julia Roberts *had* butts to lift).

Speaking of perfectly sculpted women poured into designer clothing, I was snapped out of my reverie by the approach of a heavy cloud of perfume as Sidra, Sally, and Samantha all glided by in the hallway, as if on cue, on three pairs of Jimmy Choos I couldn't have walked in if I tried.

Wendy and I called them 'the Triplets'. Somehow, miraculously, the three rulers of the fashion department roost all had names that began with an S, were pencil thin, abnormally tall, and had painfully pointy noses that seemed to match the painfully pointy toes of their stilettos.

They all looked perpetually polished, as if they visited a beauty salon each morning before they appeared at the office, which was entirely possible since they normally didn't grace us with their presence until after 11 a.m. There was never a hair out of place, never an inch of face without perfectly applied makeup, never a moment when their noses weren't fixed permanently in the air.

I caught pieces of their conversation as they passed.

'Oh . . . my . . . God,' Sidra DeSimon, *Mod's* coldly beautiful fashion and beauty director, said, sounding remarkably like Chandler's ex-girlfriend Janice, from *Friends*. I wondered momentarily just how one managed to develop a voice that nasal. 'She was carrying a Louis Vuitton bag from *last season*.'

Sally and Samantha both gasped at this apparent mortal sin.

'Last season?' Sally asked incredulously, scurrying after Sidra.

'Ugh.' I could see Samantha shudder in horror before they disappeared around the corner.

I made a face as I choked on the cloud of Chanel No. 5 they left swirling in their wake.

How they managed to afford the latest in designer fashions on editorial salaries was beyond me. I suspected that, like many of the stick-thin, model-tall fashionistas who inhabited the hallways and abused the expense accounts of the country's top women's magazines, all three Triplets were trust-fund babies. It didn't hurt that their penchant for \$2,000 pants and the latest Jimmy Choos, Manolo Blahniks, or Prada boots was assisted by their access to the magazine's fashion closet and a ream of eager-to-please designers they probably had on speed-dial.

Sidra, the oldest of the Triplets and their fearless leader, was a bit of a legend in the New York editorial world. She claimed to have dated George Clooney for a month or so in the mid-nineties and had used that fact as a sort-of job reference throughout the rest of her career. She was known

to frequently drop ‘When George and I were dating . . .’ into various conversations where the words really didn’t belong.

For George’s part, he denied that he knew her. That hadn’t stopped her from dragging his name through the mud to her advantage – and to the endless delight of the New York gossip scene. Her name was a Page Six staple.

For reasons I still hadn’t entirely figured out, Sidra had developed an instant dislike for me the moment I’d set foot through *Mod*’s doors a year and a half ago. The more I got to know her, the more I suspected it was a case of clear-cut professional jealousy. I was fifteen years her junior, and I was just one step below her on the editorial chain.

My few attempts during the first month to ingratiate myself with a quick chat were met immediately with a cold shoulder, and to date, we’d never even had an actual conversation. Half the time she refused to even acknowledge my existence, and otherwise she badmouthed me around the office. My coworkers, thankfully, knew her well enough that her complaints tended to go in one ear and out the other.

Unfortunately, she also loved badmouthing me to people at other magazines who didn’t quite know how catty and bizarre she was. Once, at a Fashion Week celebrity fashion show, I even overheard her telling a senior editor from *In Style* that I was a delusional intern who liked to pretend that I was *Mod*’s celebrity editor, and it was best to just ignore me and play along.

As the director of fashion and beauty for *Mod*, Sidra oversaw Sally and Samantha, who were clearly being groomed to become her clones. So far, it was working out. Sally, the fashion editor, didn’t yet understand that dressing models in Gucci and Versace couture didn’t quite fly with most *Mod* readers, who didn’t make enough money in a decade to buy the clothes that Sally would order for one shoot. Not exactly the best way to compete with *Cosmo* in the circulation trenches.

Samantha, the beauty editor, was responsible for the magazine's makeup tips. She was apparently equally confused, failing to realize that not everyone had the high cheekbones, full lips, and flawless complexion that she did. Of course, not everyone had the good fortune to be sleeping with Dr Stephen McDermott, Manhattan's premier 'Dermatologist to the Stars', either.

The only way to tell the Triplets apart, I sometimes thought, was by the fact that Sidra was the only one who had already invested \$20,000 in breast implants by Dr David Aramayo, arguably the best plastic surgeon in Manhattan. I was sure that the others weren't far behind. They were doubtlessly working out payment plans now.

I wished that Wendy hadn't gone home already. I would have loved to end the day by trading one-liners about Sidra. It was a favorite pastime of ours. And it was completely harmless, because Sidra liked to pretend, for whatever reason, that she had no concept Wendy and I even existed, despite the fact that we had attended editorial meetings together for the last eighteen months. If we didn't exist, then I figured our derogatory comments didn't matter much.

I looked back at my computer screen, which still appeared to be taunting me. A one-night stand actually sounded frighteningly good at the moment. Hell, even Sidra, who had all the warmth and sex appeal of the iceberg that took out the Titanic, was probably getting laid more often than I was.

On that note, I printed out the two thousand words I'd managed to choke out throughout the day. It was 6:30. On the off chance that Margaret was lurking somewhere in the nearly empty office, I knew I'd better get home before she could blindside me with another ridiculous assignment.