

forgotten

Friday

October 14 (Thurs.)

Outfit:

- *Straight-leg jeans*
- *Navy tunic with the little flowers (wasn't dirty – back in the closet)*
- *Blister-inducing red flats*

School:

- *Bring book for English*
- *Get Mom to sign permission slip for history*
- *Spanish quiz tomorrow (not on syllabus)*
- *Read over history homework in the morning . . . too tired . . .*

Notes:

- *Ate tons of carbs today (Mom bought mint chocolate chip ice cream!) EXERCISE!*
- *Ordered tights for Halloween*

ONE

AREN'T FRIDAYS SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD?

This one started badly.

The note on my nightstand didn't tell me anything useful. My eyelids wanted to stay closed; my favourite jeans were in the hamper, and there was no milk in the fridge.

Worst of all, my cell phone was dead: the shiny, candy red one that I'll have until it falls into a gutter; the one that has the calendar and reminder bells and is essentially my portable, socially acceptable security blanket.

'You'll be fine,' my mom said during the drive to school this morning.

'How do you know?' I asked. 'I could have a huge math test today. There could be a school assembly that I won't know about.'

'It's just one day, London. You'll be fine without your phone for one day.'

'Easy for you to say,' I muttered, looking out the window.

Now, right now, standing here, I have proof that my mom was wrong. I am *not* fine without my phone for one day.

CAT PATRICK

Today is the day that I needed a new T-shirt for gym class. Had it not been dead, my phone, the phone my mom and I programmed together at the start of the year with important little reminders like this one, would have instructed me, in its tiny block lettering, to bring a shirt for PE today.

Therefore, today is the day I'm standing in gym shorts and my winter sweater, wondering what to do.

I can't very well wear a sweater for basketball (which is what we're playing, according to the board near the locker room door), so I ask Page if she has an extra top. We won't ever really be friends, but she still responds overenthusiastically. 'Sure, London, here you go. Forgot your clean shirt again, huh?'

Again?

I make a mental note to jot myself a real note later, while at the same time wondering why today's note didn't mention bringing a gym shirt.

Page interrupts my train of thought. She smiles and hands me a bright yellow oversized tee with a beaming cat on it that reads: 'Have a purr-fect day!'

'Thanks, Page,' I grumble, as I take the shirt from her and quickly put it on. It nearly covers the shorts – shorts! – that I'm already wearing. Why my locker contained shorts and not some other warmer, cuter piece of bottom-covering sportswear, I have no clue.

Note to self: add 'bring pants' to note to self, too.

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I feel like Page is watching me. I glance at her and, yep, she's watching me. We exchange pleasant nods before I throw my street clothes into the locker, slam it, and head out to the gym.

As I walk, two thoughts run through my mind. First, I wonder whether Ms Martinez will let me go to the nurse's office for a Band-Aid to cover the painful heel blister that I can feel grating against my sneaker with every step. And, second, I can't help but thank my lucky stars that only the twelve other hapless souls with first-period gym class will see me in this hideous ensemble.

Unfortunately for me, Ms Martinez is a coldhearted woman.

'No,' she says, when I ask to go to the nurse's office before the game begins.

'No?' I ask in disbelief.

'No,' she says again, black eyes daring me to argue. She holds her whistle at the ready.

I'm not stupid, so I don't press the issue. Instead, I hobble back to the bench, join my teammates, and vow to play through the pain.

Then halfway through what I can only assume is the lowest-scoring basketball game in high-school sports history, a noise ricochets through the echoing gym that all at once makes my arm hairs stand on end, my eardrums seize up, and my teeth chatter.

For a moment, I don't know what's going on.

Ms Martinez waves her arms in the direction of the exit, and my classmates begin lazily walking towards the doorway.

CAT PATRICK

That's when I get it.

We are having a fire drill.

We, the students of Meridan High School, are going outside. All 956 of us. While I, London Lane, am sporting a bright yellow cat T-shirt that says 'Have a Purr-fect day!' and too-short shorts for the entire student body to enjoy.

Yep, it's a good Friday indeed.

TWO

THE GYMNASIUM IS CLOSE TO AN EXIT, SO WE'RE AMONG THE FIRST to make it to the safety of the faculty parking lot. Surrounded by the odd assortment of vehicles, from a station wagon here to a cherry red Porsche there, I watch apathetic students saunter out of the concrete block that is our high school, as if they're impervious to fire.

Not that I believe there's a fire.

My guess is that some moron pulled the alarm to be funny, not having the foresight to realise that he or she would then be forced to stand in the cold for an hour while waiting for the fire trucks to arrive and the firemen to clear the building and *finally* make the screeching alarm stop.

It's windy, and I think I see snow flurries. With every gust, I pull myself tighter into a ball to try to stay warm.

It's not working.

I yank my hair out of its messy knot at the nape of my neck, hoping it will act as a scarf. Immediately, the wind sets flight to my bright auburn locks, and I am both blinded and repeatedly face-whipped.

As the hordes of students gather, I hear whispers and chuckles,

CAT PATRICK

presumably about my outfit. I swear I hear the click of a camera phone but by the time I peer through my wild mane, the photographer has hidden the evidence. Still, the trace of giggling from inside a tight circle of cheerleaders makes me nervous.

I stare at their backs until Alex Morgan whips her head of shiny black hair in my direction and locks eyes with me. She looks like she took time to apply an extra layer of jet-black eyeliner before evacuating the building.

Priorities.

Alex smirks at me, turns back to the huddle, and more giggles erupt from it.

At this moment, I wish for my best friend, Jamie. The girl has her faults, but she'll never back down from a cheerleader's slams.

Alone with my bare legs and purr-fect T-shirt, I hear bits and pieces of conversations about weekend plans, the 'test we're missing right now', and 'let's just take off and drive to Reggie's for breakfast, since we're already out here'. I hug my arms to my torso even tighter, partially to shield myself from the weather and partially to obscure the cat.

'Nice T-shirt,' says a smooth male voice, with just a touch of mockery. Using my left hand as a makeshift ponytail holder, I grab all the hair I can catch and turn in the direction of the voice.

And then time stops.

I see the smile first. There is an unmistakable sweetness peeking

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through the teasing. My armour begins to crumble before I've made my way up to the eyes; what's left of it melts away at the sight of them. Sparkling pale cornflower blue with darker flecks, surrounded by eyelashes any girl would envy.

Looking at me.

Right at me.

Even more than his mouth, his eyes are smiling.

If there was something near me – a piece of furniture, even a non-hostile person – I might reach out and physically steady myself because I feel off-balance in his presence. In a good way.

Wow.

And then it's all gone. The shirt, the phone, basketball, Alex Morgan.

There's nothing but the boy before me.

He looks like he belongs in either Hollywood or heaven. I could stare at him all day.

'Thanks,' I say, after who knows how long. I force myself to blink. His face looks familiar somehow, but only in the way that I want it to.

Wait, do I remember him?

Please, oh please, oh please let me remember him.

I thumb through years and years of faces in the album in my brain. This face is nowhere to be found.

For a glimmer of a second, I'm sad about that fact. Then my optimistic side springs forth. I'm probably wrong. He has to be in there somewhere.

CAT PATRICK

Where were we? Oh, the outfit . . .

‘I’m trying to start a new trend,’ I joke.

I shift my body so that the wind blows my hair out of my eyes; I force myself to notice something other than his.

‘I like your shoes,’ I add.

‘Uh, thanks,’ he says awkwardly, as he, too, looks down at his chocolate brown Converse All Stars. With not much left to say about shoes, he unzips and removes his tan hoodie.

Before I know what’s happening, he’s draping it around my shoulders and it’s like I’m protected from the world, not just the elements. The fleece lining is warm from his body and smells faintly of soap and fabric softener and just . . . guy. A perfect kind of guy.

He’s standing a little close to me for a stranger, now in just his own T-shirt. It looks vintage; I’ve never heard of the band.

‘Thanks,’ I say again, as if it’s one of only ten words I know in the English language. ‘But aren’t you cold?’

He laughs, as though that’s the most ridiculous question in the world, and says, simply, ‘No.’

Can’t guys be cold?

‘OK. Well, thanks,’ I say, for the millionth time in two seconds.

What is it with me and that word?

‘It’s really no problem,’ he says. ‘I figured you could use it. You’re turning blue,’ he adds, nodding towards my legs. ‘I’m Luke, by the way.’

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‘London,’ is all I can manage.

‘Cool name,’ he says with an easy smile. I can see a hint of a dimple in one of his cheeks. ‘Memorable,’ he adds. Very funny, I think.

A shriek pulls me from my Luke-induced trance.

‘London, WHAT are you wearing?’ Jamie Connor screams so loudly that at least five people stop their conversations and turn towards us. ‘Please tell me you have pants on.’

I take back my wish for her to appear. She can go away now.

‘Shhh, Jamie, people are staring,’ I say, pulling her close to me to try to shut her up. I can smell the perfume that my best friend will wear forever.

‘Sorry,’ she says. ‘But you’re kind of a disaster,’ she adds with a little laugh. I frown at her.

‘Bad morning?’ she asks, looping her arm through mine.

‘Yep,’ I answer quietly, still very aware that Luke is nearby. ‘I forgot my gym shirt. Again.’

Jamie gives me a sympathetic shoulder nudge before changing the subject. ‘I don’t even want to ask who lent you that one. Have you seen Anthony out here?’ she asks, as she searches the crowd. But then her interest in Anthony comes to a screeching halt when she spots Luke. My Luke.

‘Hey,’ she says to him.

‘Hey,’ he says back. He refuses to look right at Jamie; I might like it a little.

CAT PATRICK

‘Who are you?’ she asks, head cocked like a curious cat.

‘Luke Henry,’ he says, finally focusing on her for a blink. ‘It’s my first day at Meridan.’ He looks away again and scans the crowd, as if he’s grown tired of being where he is. I notice that he keeps his head low, like he doesn’t want to attract attention.

Jamie is not used to boys looking away, and, frankly, with the short skirt and tight top she’s wearing, I’m surprised by Luke’s disinterest. She shifts her weight, pops a hip, and continues.

‘What year are you?’ Jamie asks.

‘Junior,’ Luke answers.

‘Cool. Us, too,’ she says. I think she might be finished with the questions, but no such luck. ‘So, why start on a Friday?’

Luke glances at Jamie, then his eyes find mine and there it is again. He’s back.

‘I didn’t have anything better to do today,’ he says matter-of-factly. ‘We were unpacked. Why not?’

‘I see . . . and where did you come from?’

Make it stop!

‘I just moved here from Boston.’

‘You don’t have an accent,’ Jamie points out.

‘I wasn’t born there.’

‘Gotcha,’ Jamie says, as she flips her blonde hair out of her eyes. It’s one of her signature moves – one she’ll do in college and beyond – and, best friend or not, my claws are out.

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My posture has obviously stiffened, because Jamie pulls back a little from me to examine my face. She looks at Luke, then back at me again.

‘Hmmm,’ she mutters, and I’m terrified that she is going to state the obvious, but, instead, she continues the third degree. ‘Well, where were you before Boston . . .’

Jamie is interrupted by the sudden, quiet calm. Alarm under control, Principal Flowers grabs his megaphone and herds us back inside in a tone that says he loathes every waking minute spent in our presence.

Jamie and I look at each other, then burst out laughing at the booming voice coming from tiny Principal Flowers. At least that’s what I’m laughing about.

When we recover, I look back at Luke. Well, I *want* to look back at Luke.

But he’s gone.

I pan the crowd furiously, but all that stands out in the sea of drab colours are bright red, white, and black cheerleading sweaters. Definitely not what I’m looking for. I feel myself beginning to panic, in that way you do when you lose something you really love, like a favourite watch or pen or pair of jeans.

We’re moving now, Jamie and I, arm in arm. In fact, I’m pretty sure that’s why I’m moving: because Jamie is pulling me forwards.

Finally, I see it.

CAT PATRICK

My insides do cartwheels when I spy Luke's T-shirt making its way towards the building. His head hangs low and he walks slowly but with purpose, conveying untouchable coolness. I am thrilled by the sight of him, but then disappointed.

How could he just walk away like that?

We had a moment, didn't we?

We had a moment, he lent me his hoodie, and he left. And now, he's walking back to class like nothing happened. Like he never met an interesting, albeit vertically challenged, redhead.

We had a moment, and now Luke Henry from Boston is over it, and I'm gripping my best friend's arm so tightly at the sight of his backside that said best friend gives me a look and twists her arm free.

All at once, my morning dips again, and I feel lower than I did when I discovered that my cell phone was dead. Funny how possibility can lift you. Funny how reality can slam you down.

I watch Luke's back from twenty feet behind as he strides down the PE corridor, past the locker rooms and the Driver's Education and Officer Training classrooms, and towards the commons. It's as if nothing happened. Nothing at all. And who knows? Maybe it didn't.

But as Luke Henry rounds the corner and slips out of view, there is one thing I know for sure. One thing that gives me a glimmer of a shard of a bit of hope that we'll see each other again.

I'm still wearing his sweatshirt.

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* * *

‘Good day today?’ Mom asks when I fall into the Prius.

‘It was OK,’ I say, turning on the radio.

‘You seem to have survived without your cell phone. Anything interesting happen?’ She drives us out of the school parking lot and turns towards home.

Shrugging, I say, ‘A new guy started today.’

My mom glances in my direction, then faces forwards. I can tell she’s trying not to smile, but her efforts aren’t working.

‘A cute guy?’ she asks. I can’t help but smile, too.

‘Yes.’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Luke.’

‘Did you talk to him?’ she asks.

‘A little. We had a fire drill and we ended up standing near each other. He’s pretty cool.’

My mom is quiet a moment, probably sensing that I’m about to put an end to the conversation. But then, nosy as she will always be, she can’t resist one more question.

‘Was he in your notes this morning?’ she asks casually. I consider changing the subject or cranking up the radio even louder, but since she’s one of two people I can talk to about my condition, I turn to face her in my seat and answer.

‘That’s what’s weird!’ I say.

CAT PATRICK

‘What do you mean?’ she asks excitedly.

‘Well, he wasn’t in my notes this morning, but I had this whole conversation with him and everything,’ I say. ‘It was bizarre.’

‘Maybe you just forgot to mention him,’ Mom offers. We’re turning into our development now. I shake my head.

‘Maybe,’ I say, not wanting to discuss him any more. In truth, I know there’s no way I would forget to mention Luke Henry.

We’re almost home when my mom’s cell phone rings from the centre compartment. ‘Sorry, honey, I’ve got to grab this.’

‘No problem,’ I say, happy to be left alone to daydream.

In the middle of the night, pen in hand, the hope seeps out of me. Luke’s hoodie is in the laundry, but his face is almost gone. For three hours, I’ve tried to attach him to my forwards memories. I’ve quizzed myself: Do we share a class? Will we go out? Will I know him for years to come? But with the clock counting down to 4:33 a.m. – the time when my mind resets and my memory is wiped clean – I have to admit that Luke Henry is nowhere to be found.

He’s not in my memory, which means he’s not in my future.

When I finally accept it, the truth stings. But there’s no time to dwell on it, and there are only two choices: I can remind myself about someone who is not a part of my life, or I can leave him out of my notes to save myself from going through this all over again tomorrow.

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This late, with my mind just minutes from 'reset', it doesn't seem much of a choice at all. I grit my teeth and grip the pen and do what I have to do.

I lie to myself.