

REMIX

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*For Lora,
my first – and best – festival buddy*

FRIDAY

KAZ

It's not unusual to wake up to at least two or three messages sent by my best friend during the hours all the normal people use for sleeping. Today there are fourteen.

Should I bother taking wellies with me? Sent at 00.23, which is *technically* the day that we're leaving for the festival. I'm not surprised – Ruby isn't so much last minute as last nanosecond.

Decided against wellies. They make you sweaty. Sweat foot vs trench foot.

Not that I'm hoping for trench foot. I just Googled it. Gross.

She's embellished this with a particularly helpful (disturbing) picture of a rotting foot.

Can't find my good bra. The purple one that fastens at the front and makes me look like I've got something inside. Did I leave it at yours last Friday?

Bra was in the laundry and smells of beer (???) now in the washing machine. Going to make a playlist for the journey while I wait for it to finish. Requests?

Sans helpful input from you, this playlist is 80% Gold'ntone. At this rate it'll be longer than their set on Saturday. (SATURDAY!!!)

Got distracted from making the playlist by Tumblring Wexler pics. Here's the best.

Adam Wexler, lead singer of Gold'ntone, smoulders from my phone as he pulls up the collar of an expensive-looking jacket. (It's a distinct improvement on the diseased foot.) His teeth bite down on his bottom lip as if suppressing a smile. I only have to speculate about what he's thinking for my breath to accelerate and my cheeks to burn.

Are your eyes totally having sex with that picture? Because mine are.

(Just my eyes.)

OVERSHARE KLAXON.

(Joking – I really am just looking at it with my eyes.)

God. You're so boring when you're asleep.

Needless to say, the call I make goes straight to voicemail.

"Ruby here. Your call is very important to me, so please leave a message. Unless you are Stuart Cheating Shitbag Garside, in which case, fuck right off."

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My name might not be Stuart Garside, but I decline to leave a message anyway since she never checks them. I write one instead.

*My eyes thank you for the wake-up Wexler sex – it *almost* makes up for the fact that you'll have neglected to put any Little John songs on that playlist. (Please rectify.) Also, you seem confused about the smell of your bra. Maybe this photo will help.*

Taken last week, it's of Ruby, standing on the dancefloor, arms wide, head thrown back, mouth open in an all-consuming laugh as an anonymous pair of arms showers her with a bottle of beer as if it's champagne.

Time to actually get out of bed.

The bathroom shows evidence of my sister – saturated bathmat, towels on the floor and an apothecary’s worth of products surrounding the sink. She’s used all the hot water too.

“Why do you smell like my new body oil?” Naomi asks when I come back after my shower. She is sitting in the middle of my bed, flipping through one of my magazines from which she’s already ripped a pile of discount vouchers.

“Why are you in my room?” I ask. “Don’t you have kittens to skin or dreams to crush? Some packing to finish?”

“It’s finished. I’ve nothing to do until Dad gets here.”
(Except annoy me, obviously.)

Naomi blackmailed a weekend trip to London out of him when she found out he’d bought my Remix ticket. She doesn’t seem to care that it was a reward for revising so hard for my exams, but then Naomi doesn’t care about anything other than herself. My sister is two years younger and two hundred times more self-absorbed – a character trait I rely on when I pad over to where my clothes are hanging on the wardrobe door. I’d much rather she studied the outfits in that magazine than the one I’m about to put on...

“*That’s* what you’re wearing?” Naomi says, dashing my hopes. “Is it new?”

“Mm-hm.” I bite my lips together as I pull the dress from the hanger, wishing she’d leave.

“And you’re going to wear it to a scuzzy music festival?”

“Are you going to keep asking pointless questions?”

“Are you?” she whips back, but I’m too busy contorting myself into the dress to reply. When I turn round, Naomi’s

watching me with a supercilious smirk. She knows the reason why I'm making such an effort. Last week she told me that she'd found out my ex-boyfriend was going to Remix too. Tom's dad and ours have been friends since university and although Tom and I haven't been to each other's houses since the break-up, that hasn't stopped the dads. My sister overheard them grumbling about having to pay extortionate ticket prices over a late-night game of *Halo*. Since then she's been using this knowledge to her advantage. Naomi knows I'd rather cover all her chores than risk Mum – or Ruby – finding out about Tom going this weekend.

I meet her gaze in the mirror as I twist my hair to dry in better curls.

I don't trust the look on her face. "What?"

12 "Why so suspicious, Karizma?" Naomi is the sort of person who refuses to use nicknames. "I was just thinking you look almost decent."

"Let's hope Tom thinks so," I mutter. Although I'd rather he ranked me a little higher than "almost".

"Just don't ruin the effect by following him around with stupid puppy-dog eyes and agreeing with every little thing he says."

Naomi has officially exceeded her tolerance quota. "You can leave any second now."

Rolling her eyes, she collects the vouchers she's thieved from my magazine and stalks towards the door. "I'm only trying to help – although God knows why. You might be boring and your eyebrows need threading, but even you can do better than a tedious meathead with terrible trousers."

Naomi's never been Tom's biggest fan.

"At what point were you going to say something helpful?"

"Don't make yourself too available, Karizma. People work harder for the things they can't have."

"Exactly how many people have you been out with?"

She smiles, a tightening of the lips and an arch of well-threaded eyebrows. "No one's worked hard enough."

Honestly, I can't see why they'd want to.

RUBY

Putting your bra on to wash the night before you want to wear it is a pretty stupid idea. Not taking it out until the next morning is an even stupider one.

"What are you doing?" Lee is standing in the doorway of our parents' bedroom.

"Drying my bra," I shout back over the noise of the hairdryer. Even though I'm using my mother's super-powerful, super-posh one, it's taking ages. That's the problem with padding – it absorbs like a motherfucker.

"Ever heard of a tumble dryer?"

"You know nothing."

"About women's underwear? You're right. I don't." There's a pause. "Good job they've left for work already."

I don't have anything to say to that. Hairdryer aside, it's hard to feel any joy that my parents' idea of a decent goodbye is a Post-it note on my door.

Didn't want to wake you. Listen to Lee and do your best not to get into any trouble.

They didn't even sign off. Further proof that daughter/parental relations are at an all-time low.

Lee's still in the doorway, looking annoyingly like someone who's packed. Not much of a surprise since he's had to get ready to leave for Australia on Tuesday. Everything's in piles on his bedroom floor: "Stuff to Stay", "Stuff to Take Around the World", "Stuff to Take to Remix". My bedroom floor is covered in one big pile of "Stuff That Ruby Can't Be Arsed to Put Away". A category that includes all the things I was supposed to have packed last night before I got distracted with playlists and Wexler pics.

"How much do you love me?" I shout over the hairdryer.

14 "Enough to let you come to a music festival with me."

There's a time limit on how long he can milk that one, but it's best not to mention it when I'm fishing for a favour.

"Do you love me enough to let me come to a music festival with you *and* get me some breakfast whilst I finish packing?"

Apparently he does. By the time he returns, I'm in my room, the bra sufficiently dry for me to be wearing it under the Stiff Records T-shirt that violated St Felicity's School for Young Ladies' "code of conduct and civil decency" on mufti day. I made a point of wearing it to my last exam – just for good measure. Lee slides a plate of custard creams and a mug of black coffee into the space I've just cleared by elbowing some sketchbooks off my desk – my hands are kind of occupied, my fingers covered

in eyeshadow because I can't find my brushes.

"You've always been my favourite," I say, blowing him a kiss in the mirror.

"Like that would be hard." Lee shifts some stuff off the end of my bed so he can sit down.

"Ed's in the running," I say. Mostly because Ed, who's so old now that he's got a job, a flat and a fiancée, used to let me stay up late and watch films with him whenever he was roped into babysitting. That backfired when *Terminator 2* gave me nightmares and our parents passed babysitting duties to Callum, who made every one of the four years he had on me count double by refusing to share snacks and forcing me to go to bed on time.

"You're right. Ed's top of my list, Callum next, *then* you," Lee says, grinning at me, and I stick my tongue out at the same time as I poke myself in the eye. I'm not great at multitasking.

Lee's lying anyway. I've lost count of the number of times we've agreed that this has been the best year of our lives now that Callum has taken his sarcasm and stupid specky face off to university along with his back catalogue of *National Geographic* and foreign film boxsets.

Time to abort the make-up mission. I have a) run out of time and b) started to look as if I'd have been better off mashing my face into an eyeshadow palette and hoping for the best. Also c) Lee is eating my breakfast – something he is only too happy to demonstrate by opening his mouth to show me a half-chewed custard cream.

"You're disgusting. I don't know how Owen puts up with you." I shovel three biscuits in at once while Lee checks his phone.

"You can ask him yourself, since he's just pulled up." Lee looks at the rucksack on my bed. It's so empty that it's folded in on itself like a mouth without teeth. "Get a shift on, Pubes, or I'll leave you behind."

"Always abandoning me," I mutter, but Lee shoots me a look that kills the joke dead. Guess now's not the time to guilt-trip him about his gap year – the closer next Tuesday gets, the touchier he's become.

Whatever. I've a festival to pack for.

When Lee shouts up that they're ready to go, I'm already out of the bedroom door, fully loaded with rucksack, sleeping bag and a pocketful of custard creams. Mostly charged phone in hand, I dial Kaz.

"Be ready, my friend. We're coming to—"

"Did you put any Little John on the playlist?"

"Don't interrupt. I was trying to be all cool and movie-like," I say, hurrying down the stairs.

"I'm sorry, please go ahead."

"Be ready, my friend. We're coming to get you. The weekend officially starts *now*."

There's a pause. "You've forgotten to put any Little John songs on the playlist, haven't you?"

"Yes."