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ONE

First, I brush up on the lingo. *Ring* me instead of *call* me, *tube* instead of *subway*, *TV* instead of *tube*, *chips* instead of *fries*, *crisps* instead of *chips* . . . I study the latest on Keira, Kylie and Kate Moss. Even though I'll be an American in London, I'd rather die than be one of *those* Americans: Hawaiian shirt, cowboy hat, big hair, loud mouth – a general 'tude that they are all that. (You know who you are.) Not my style at all. My plan is to blend in, not stick out. What better way to observe British teens in their natural habitat than by being invisible?

'Breathe,' I say out loud. Standing in my New York City bedroom, deciding what to pack, I feel my chest burn. It's been nearly impossible to breathe normally since Nell Wickham, the editor-in-chief of *Scene* magazine, looked away from her mirror long enough to smile on me. She called me *hers*. She even called me 'Susanna' instead of every imaginable mangling of my

name. But, best of all, she entrusted me with a mission: fly to London and report on the local teen scene for the brand-new, aptly-titled *Teen Scene* magazine. Can you believe it? London. As in England. Where the Arctic Monkeys were born and Daniel Radcliffe read his first *Harry Potter*. The town where tabloids rock.

I, Susanna Barringer, am going international. I've already done New York, Los Angeles and the wilds of Fashion Week. Tomorrow, I take London by storm. The city on the Thames. Where James Blunt has a flat and the Queen has a palace.

Sweet!

Up to this moment in my ever-blossoming career, I've endured multiple humiliations: squeezing into tiny clothes in *Scene*'s fashion closet, riding to the Academy Awards in the trunk of a limo, getting thrown off a set, out of a theatre, exposed from behind a rack of designer duds, seeing my butt on the cover of *Scene* magazine. Now, those embarrassing days are behind me. I'm no longer the nerdy high-schooler who tripped into the internship of a lifetime. It's my time to shine. Get ready, world! Here I come – Susanna Barringer – the fearless reporter who gets the story no matter what.

Of course, I'll be flying three thousand miles into a foreign country, by myself, for an entire month. And I'll be staying with Nell's sister in a village *outside* London which may be more of a nightmare than a dream. Plus, I have no idea exactly how I'm going to get a scoop and I've never liked tea. Do they even *have* Starbucks in Europe?

What*ev*. I can handle anything that comes my way. Even tea. Or steak and kidney pie. Or a Mini-Me of Nell who makes my life a living hell. Starting tomorrow, I'll be free to do what I do best: defy the odds and show everyone what a mere Millennial can do. I very nearly have it *all*. Including (sigh) a real, live boyfriend . . .

Let me back up a few months.

Irony of ironies, my love life began in the Virgin Megastore.

'Did you see that fact-checker video on *Funny or Die*?' Ben McDermott asked me.

We were sitting in the downstairs café of the Virgin Megastore in Times Square, sharing a brownie. For the first time in my life, I couldn't even finish my half. Fashion Week was over, the school year had just begun. My stomach was doing somersaults. Ben looked

unbearably cute. His reddish-brown hair was gelled, his cheeks were pink. When he smiled, the edges of his blue eyes crinkled like Christmas paper.

'Yeah,' I said. 'It was hilarious.'

My skin was on fire. Ben wasn't my boyfriend *yet.* That day in the café, we were just getting to know each other again. See, Ben McDermott was my first love – in ninth grade, when I didn't know what love was. Not that I do now. But before I could even try to figure it out, Ben moved to Chicago. Yeah, I know. Seriously bunk. Then he moved back and we ran into each other and my skin erupted in flames.

'You're so tall,' he said to me.

I was wearing the same Payless platform shoes I'm wearing now. The four-inch height shaves off a cool five pounds. Which, BTW, is how I view my body now: I'm not fat, I'm too short for my weight. Unless, of course, I'm wearing four-inch platforms. Then, I'm just right.

'I've been working on an online video with my friend, Jason,' Ben said to me that day.

'Yeah?'

'It's harder than it looks.'

'Yeah.'

'Still, it'll be totally cool when we're done. I'm

hoping to use my video to get into the film department at USC.'

'Oh yeah?'

Stop saying, yeah, *Susanna!* I screamed in my head. *What happened to the stellar vocabulary that got you two bylines in* Scene *magazine?! And did he just say USC?? As in US* California*?*

Ben must have sensed me freaking out, because he asked, 'Wanna roll out of here?'

'Affirmative,' I said, sounding like the doof of the century.

We stood. I wobbled in my platform shoes. Up the escalator and through the revolving door, we emerged into the neon circus of Times Square. Tourists bumped into us as we walked. I wanted to grab Ben's hand, but waited for him to grab mine. I still wasn't sure where we were heading – relationship-wise – and I wanted him to lead the way.

'Chicago is awesome,' he said. 'But I've missed New York.'

Before my brain had the chance to review what my mouth was about to say, I blurted out, 'I've missed *you*.'

Instantly, my eyes went wide and my skin went pale. I wanted to gobble up the words the moment I spat them out.

'I mean—' I spluttered. But it was too late. There, beneath the blue globe of Planet Hollywood, Ben McDermott sent me into orbit. He took my face between his two warm hands and kissed me. Right there on Broadway and Forty-Fifth.

'I've missed you, too,' he whispered. Then he kissed me harder.

'Susanna!' Mom interrupts the sweet memory of Ben's first two kisses by yelling down the hall.

'What?' I yell back through my bedroom door.

'Mel is here,' she says.

My heart plummets. Mel (Amelia) is my best friend. Ben (sigh) is my boyfriend. The boy I've kissed hundreds of times since that over-the-moon moment in Times Square. Tonight, on the night flight out of JFK airport, I'll be leaving them both behind.