

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

I woke up to SOS by Rihanna playing on my purple digital alarm clock. I got out of bed, grabbed my new toothbrush with too many bristles, and brushed my crooked teeth. I pulled my fried blonde hair back into a ponytail to wash my face.

Wait – that doesn't make sense. I got my hair cut on Monday, and it was too short to pull back into a ponytail. So that can't have been Thursday.

Why can't I remember Thursday? Thursday was the most important day of my life! So far. Did I do so bad that I forgot? Was my memory lapse self-preservation? What happened on Thursday?

Let's try again.

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

I, Shiloh LaFleur woke up to my alarm clock beeping loud, even beeps.

No, that doesn't make sense either. My alarm clock plays the radio, it doesn't beep. But beeping feels important...

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

Something beeped.

Well, that doesn't help. Maybe I shouldn't start with the beginning of the day. Maybe I should try to remember *anything* from that day.

Thursday, November 23, 2006. Thursday, November 23, 2006. Thursday, November 23, 2006...

The dentist! I remember the dentist. I went for a cleaning. When his face was over mine, he eclipsed the bulb behind him, and I was fine. But then he'd move his head to grab a tool or something, and the light would burn; my eyes watered. I remember that.

But wait... That wasn't Thursday. That was Tuesday! Though, light feels important too.

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Something beeped, and there was definitely light. Okay, I'm getting somewhere. I think.

Maybe it's best I start from the beginning.

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

I woke up to my alarm clock. Maybe it was SOS. It must have been. Okay, then I brushed my teeth with my Hello Kitty toothbrush.

Wait, what? I've only seen that toothbrush in old home videos. It hasn't been mine since I was a kid!

Okay. New approach: what's happened since?

Oh my God. What *has* happened since?

I don't remember. How? That doesn't make sense. What day is it now? It's gotta be Saturday. Maybe Sunday... I hope it's Saturday, I don't want to go to school tomorrow. I didn't finish my book report, and that will upset Mrs. Fritz. "Again, Shiloh?" She'll say. "You're smart, you have so much potential. Apply yourself." God, I loathe those words! Pretty hard to apply myself when *myself* is distracted by the other eight trillion things I want to do with my day... Ugh, I hope it's Saturday.

Stop. It doesn't matter.

Working backwards isn't helping. Let's figure out Thursday.

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

I woke up. SOS. Brushed my teeth – bristly toothbrush. Washed my face – no ponytail.

It's a start.

Beeping... Beeping...

Beeping! The delivery truck outside. They dropped off a large heavy-looking package for the neighbors. I guessed it was a fridge.

Or was that Wednesday? ...No. It must have been Thursday, that's the only thing that makes sense. Okay, I figured out beeping.

Now, lights.

Lights, lights, lights... Spotlight? That would make sense. It was the most important day of my life – so far – and I was going to be on stage, I think. For what? Ballet? A play? A spelling bee?

Something important to me... What was important to me? Why was it important?

Why can't I remember Thursday, November 23, 2006?

Maybe it was ballet...

Okay.

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

SOS. Bristles. Hair down. Delivery truck.

Then I was on stage for hundreds, no – thousands of people! Not just any people, no. The elite; the rich and the impressionable. Some of the most renowned and prestigious critiques had attended to judge me. That's why it was so important! I was hoping to elevate my career as a ballerina, that checks out. I was performing *the impossible twirl*, - or so I nicknamed it. I used the spotlight as a point to focus while I twirled. That was dumb. Dizziness crept over me, and I signaled to my brother for a diversion – as we'd practiced before. He waddled on stage, plopped down in the center, and pulled out his toy ambulance from the pocket of his corduroy pants. He *wee-ooo-wee-ooo'd* as he rolled the toy back and forth. The distraction was enough for me to regain my balance before anyone noticed!

Nope- that doesn't make sense. 1) I was *not* a ballerina. I've never been in dance, what was I thinking? 2) I did not perform for *thousands* of people, I don't think, but certainly not renowned critiques. 3) my *baby brother* wouldn't be a *cute distraction* in that kind of setting, that is insane. Besides, he hasn't played with that ambulance since he was a toddler.

But oh my God, I have a baby brother? I didn't remember *that* before! I'll consider it another clue.

What is his name? Francis? Marcus? Something like that, I think. He had something on Thursday, too... A soccer game? That sounds right. He had a soccer game, and that's why Mom and Dad couldn't be there for my thing. My very important thing...

They said I could take Mom's car, and I could drive myself.

Thursday, November 23, 2006

I woke up, alarm clock, toothbrush, face, delivery, then I must have had breakfast. Yes. Dad usually makes breakfast. Maybe he made eggs – sunny-side-up. Or would it have been pancakes? Hm... No, pancakes were usually a Friday thing, so it must have been eggs. Maybe with hashbrowns and bacon, or a bowl of fruit and sausages...

We had breakfast as a family. I know because we do every morning, and Mom asked, "How is school?"

And Francis or Marcus, or... *Liam!* Liam said, "So, she needs a prince to kiss her?"

Wait... What? What conversation was he on? No, I must have dreamt something like that, that didn't make sense.

Thursday, November 23, 2006

Alarm, teeth, face, truck, eggs. "How is school?"

"We're learning about dinosaurs!" Said Liam. That makes more sense. So, we talked about the velociraptor – probably, that was Liam's favorite – and then we went to school. I remember the plan; Dad and Liam would follow Mom and I in Mom's car to bring me to school. Mom would leave me her car. Then, she would hop in Dad's to take Liam to his school before our parents went to work. So, I could have the car for after.

I remember the plan, but I don't remember the drive. Wait – maybe I do. Mom and I were singing Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go when we were stuck in construction. It turned into a dance session; we pretended we were on MTV! Then one of those large, yellow CAT vehicles had to back up, making our entire lane of traffic struggle to make room. *Beep, beep, beep...*

Wait, was that the beeping? Maybe. Maybe the delivery truck came on Wednesday. That makes sense.

So, I got to school, and Mom must have handed me her keys and jumped in with Dad, and then I would have had Science first. I sat in front of Bianca and the lights turned out when she tapped me on the shoulder. I turned as Mr. Harris switched on the projector and the beam of light pierced my retinas.

Was that the light?

"Are you nervous or excited?" Asked Bianca.

"Nervous!"

"We'll practice so many times after school that that won't be true anymore."

Hang on... I'm thinking of Wednesday. Wednesday, November 22, 2006, because I went to her house the night before to practice. None of this was Thursday.

Thursday, November 23-

Wait, maybe I should focus on Wednesday if I remember it better.

Okay, Wednesday, November 22, 2006.

SOS, face, eggs, etc. School.

Wait – maybe I should go through the whole thing, beat by beat. Then, I could rule everything that happened on Wednesday as things that *didn't* happen on Thursday. I'll think back carefully...

I woke up.

How did I wake up?

Umm... On my side. The blankets were half-off and dried drool had plastered on my cheek. Gross. What was my alarm clock playing...? Was it SOS?

No, I think it was the radio hosts. It was- they were talking about sandwiches, having people call in to poll the best way to cut one. Triangles, obviously.

I got out of bed and brushed my teeth. My hair was a disaster, poking up in directions that defied gravity. I had far crazier hair in the mornings since I lopped it all off, but it was entertaining! After I'd tamed the scattered beast, I used a headband to hold it all back while I washed my face.

Dad made scrambled eggs. The breakfast table was quiet. Until-

"Are you sure you're comfortable taking my car?"

"Yes, mom!" It would be the first time. I got my license a week prior, and every other time I drove, my parents chaperoned. They were doing a parental trust fall. They didn't like falling; that was painted boldly in the lines around their eyes! I knew I would be fine. I wasn't a reckless driver. They couldn't shake their concerns, but I guess that's a parent thing.

However, I *did* manage to relax mom in the car – *that's* how the dance session happened!

"It's not you we don't trust, you know," she said when she dropped me off.

I wasn't convinced, but I said, "I know. I'll be careful."

She parked in the student lot before handing me her keys. She wrapped me in a bear hug. Something I would have disallowed outside of school any other day. But given the circumstances, I hugged her back. My hug reassured her, hers told me of her worries. It must be hard to be a Mom.

Science. Bianca tapped me. I turned around, but that wasn't a projector day. That must have been Thursday then. Or did Mr. Harris ever use a projector?

"It's medicine." She said.

Wait – no she didn't. Why would she say that? She said:

“Are you nervous or excited?”

I was nervous. I was so nervous! It was... *not* the most important day of my life. It wasn't- I remember! It just... *could be* the most important day of anyone else's... *If* I was impactful.

Bianca, Trish and I were best friends since fourth grade. We braided each other bracelets on Trish's 10th birthday to prove it! Mine fell off a year later, and I retied it until it became unwearable. It's far too small for my wrist now, but I repurposed it into a keychain and to this day, it goes everywhere I do!

A high school senior asked Trish to prom last year. He was hot. Well, he still is, but I don't care for him anymore. Point is: last year, it was exciting. She went with him to prom, and he got drunk before he drove her home. He got drunk, and she never made it home.

Bee and I spent last summer apart, both alone in our respective bedrooms crying and secretly experimenting with alcohol. In September, we passed each other in the halls for the first couple of weeks without ever speaking. Later, we found our loneliness more bearable when together and now, we're more inseparable than ever before. Thank God; she was a lifeline. No, a life preserver. The ocean was lonely, directionless and deep. My arms and legs grew numb and rubbery, and I was as afraid of staying still as I was moving in any direction – even down. She kept me floating, she kept me safe. So, thank God we reconnected.

Anyway, '*unrelated*,' this year, the whole school was tasked with writing an essay. An essay about the harmful effects of drunk driving. The best essay would feature on the News. The winner would get some kind of *congratulations* certificate from the mayor. The entire event was to commemorate a new and harsher drunk driving law. '*Unrelated*,' but Trish's passing put the entire thing into motion; that was obvious.

My essay won. My essay won and I was to read it aloud to thousands of people on the News. I was to recite it to hundreds of people who came to watch in person as I stood beside our mayor. It *could have* been the most important day of my life, but not necessarily... Regardless, it *was* important. And I was nervous.

I was going to go practice reading my essay at Bianca's after school, and Mom let me use her car. Bianca's home was far closer and less *traffic-ey* than Town Square. Mom thought it would be good for me to get comfortable driving alone before I had to on Thursday. I had to – because Liam had a soccer game and Mom and Dad both promised they would go.

In English, Mrs. Fritz reminded us that our book reports were almost due. I flashed Bee panicked eyes – she knew I had only gotten to chapter 5. I didn't have a report to present. Then the microwave went off in the back of the class. *Beep, beep, beep...*

Wait... We didn't have a microwave in the classroom. Why would we? What was beeping? I heard it so vividly... *Beep, beep, beep...*

Hang on. That's not my memory! I just *hear* it. Or... do I? Am I dreaming...? Maybe I'm dreaming.

Maybe I should try listening anyway...

"Has there been improvement?" That's Dad. Improvement with what?

"Can we get ice cream now?" Liam. His priorities are in order, I'll give him that, but I'd like to circle back to Dad. Has what improved?

"It's too early to tell." I don't know that voice, but Bianca said the same thing on Wednesday.

"Will it make a difference?" I had asked after the fifteenth run-through.

One *Best Friend Pep-Talk* later, and Bianca's Mom came upstairs, told me mine had called. I looked at Bee's alarm clock, it *was* getting late.

"You're gonna do great," Bianca said when she hugged me goodbye. "I'll see you tomorrow."

I got in the car and turned on the radio. The host said, "...We don't know when she will. It could be days, weeks, months... It's hard to say right now. But we're doing everything we can, and you're helping by being here."

No... That wasn't the radio. That's... my dream? Right: Focus. Listen. What is going on?

*This time, please someone come and rescue me*

*'Cause you on my mind, it's got me losing it*

*I'm lost, you got me looking for the rest of me*

*Love is testing me, but still I'm losing it*

Am I hearing that? Or am I dreaming? Or... *that* must have been the radio!

I fastened my seatbelt and started home. A periwinkle sedan in front of me was all over the road. It scared the Hell out of me, although I'll admit imagination and memory bested me. I pulled over until they turned another way and drove out of sight.

Right: Listen!!

"Ice cream?" I hear Liam say.

"Finish your Valentine's Day cards for class first. Then we'll go."

Why is his teacher getting him to do Valentine's Day cards so early? Can we get through Christmas first?!

After hitting four red lights in a row, I finally approached one that was green. I was thrilled to glide straight through it! Then, this beam of light from my left illuminated the inside of Mom's entire car. It was so blinding... I could see near nothing before me. I let off my gas and looked to the light source. It wasn't until their headlights tucked under the frame of my window that I made out a periwinkle sedan. The last thing I remember is the jolt. It doesn't feel the way you would suspect, or at least the way I imagined. The hit felt *near* but not *at*, if that makes sense. Although I suppose it was. I suppose the car door is *near* me, not *actually* me, so I guess it makes sense. But that makes it weirder... More surreal. A punch in the face feels the way you would expect. A T-Bone, as far as I remember, doesn't.

Thursday, November 23, 2006.

I did not wake up.