Elly Pickering is dreading telling her parents that she’s lost her mobile phone – again – what with the Global Financial Crisis and everything.

But losing her mobile is just the beginning. A series of technological happenings and manipulations leads Elly to question her priorities, her friendships, and Will, her fabulous – she thought – boyfriend.

Is she facing certain social death? Or can a technological breakdown sometimes be kind of a good thing?

PRAISE FOR WENDY HARMER
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I lost my mobile at the mall

Teenager on the edge of technological breakdown
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Teenager on the edge of technological breakdown

wendy harmer
Saturday afternoon.

My name is Elly Pickering. I’ve lost my mobile phone at the mall and am now facing certain death.

There are many ways a healthy fifteen-year-old girl can die. I’ll list a few of them here.

I have lost my mobile phone so …

1. My mother will kill me.

OK, she won’t try to actually, physically, murder me – she’s shorter than me, can’t run as fast as me, and won’t be able to find an axe until she finds her reading glasses. But in some ways, a sharp, fatal blow to the head would be better than the excruciating long-term abuse that will follow when I break the news. She will accuse me of being lazy, ungrateful, negligent and plain old stupid.
The idea that reading glasses can disappear in exactly the same circumstances will not occur to my mother. The first death I suffer will be from an utter lack of natural justice.

2. My father will kill me.
My father’s part in my death will be more subtle, but just as effective. He will sentence me to die by disappointment. He will not be angry. He won’t want to find a blunt instrument and cave in my skull. Instead he’ll be “let down.” His eyes will look to his lap, his shoulders will sag and there will be a long, loud escape of air from his chest, as if I have crept up behind him and pulled out his plug. He will crumple like a punctured bouncy castle. This is the third time I’ve lost my mobile and I’m sure my father thinks I deliberately throw it down a well to prove to him that there is no God.

3. My best friend will kill me.
Bianca will try to actually, physically, murder me. She stabbed me with a pen once when I borrowed her suede skirt and ripped a hole in it. The pen punctured the skin on my thigh and drew blood, the ink went into the muscle tissue and now I have the world’s tiniest tattoo. I will have this mark for life ... and all for a misdemeanor on the hide of a cow that was already dead!

   She will probably try to suffocate me with a pillow (no incriminating strangle marks) if I ever fall asleep anywhere near her – and all because there is a photo in my mobile of her standing next to Hugh Jackman. (OK, losing this is a capital offense, but she is supposed to be my BF and should show mercy.)

   There is also a text in there from Jai that he sent to me by mistake on the first night he and Bianca got together. I’ve been promising for six months to send her the photo and text, but I’ve been busy. So kill me!

   Bianca will kill me, that’s for sure, and no one will have any evidence to convict her of the crime. The “Exhibit A” of my phone could be in the lost and found box at the mall and lie there undiscovered for years until the whole thing is exposed on one of those Cold Case File shows on TV. But by then it will be too late.

   I will be long dead.

4. My boyfriend will kill me.
This will be death from the grief of a broken heart. BTW, I didn’t mention that I also lost my entire handbag and that the friendship ring Will bought me was in it. It’s silver, carved with leaves and has tiny blue stones on it. Like something Arwen Evenstar might wear on an Elves’ Night Out in Lothlórien. (Lord of the Rings is my fave movie and book.)

   The ring’s very, very gorgeous.

   The only reason I wasn’t wearing it is because I was
at the cosmetics counter trying some hand cream that is supposed to whiten your skin so you can actually have hands that look like Arwen’s (or Liv’s) and I didn’t want to get gunk on it.

Now it’s gone. I don’t even want to think what Will might say. It’s my first piece of jewelry from a boy, ever. And it’s the first piece of jewelry he has given a girl, ever. So who will die from a broken heart first – me or him – no one can tell. This could be a double homicide. (Technically not quite right, but you know what I mean.)

5. I will kill myself.
I am not a particularly dramatic person, but all my numbers, texts and photos were in my phone (one year’s worth), and if I don’t get them back my life is not worth living.
😊

Saturday. 3 p.m.
Three hours PM (post mobile).

I haven’t had my phone for three hours now.
Of course the first thing I did when I got home from the mall was to go on FacePlace and send out an emergency bulletin informing my 105 friends (including the Prime Minister of Australia) that as of midday I am uncontactable by phone. (Our house doesn’t have a landline – my mum, dad and my older sister, Tilly, all have mobiles.)

I also said in the bulletin that if anyone gets a ring from my phone it’s not me. Further to that, I advised that if they do get a call from my phone, they should keep the criminal on the line as long as possible, then ring 000 from another line so the police can track down their exact whereabouts, surround them and send in a SWAT team.
Then I put up a new picture of myself on FacePlace. I like this pic. It’s just a close-up of me smiling. I have suntanned skin, you can see a sparkle in my green eyes and my eyelashes are looking almost like a mascara ad. My long brown hair is curling over my shoulders in waves and looks really shiny. I am wearing a black tank top and my arms look slim. All in all, this is a good pic. Will took it on my camera, so that makes it extra special.

Then I Googled “lost mobile” and got 17,000,000 results. I found the five steps to follow when someone’s ripped off your phone – given that it’s entirely unlikely that I have lost it.

1. **Phone the number immediately.**
  Couldn’t do that ‘cos I have no phone. Der!

2. **Report the phone missing.**
  See above. Der!

3. **Call 1800 LOST and get a block on the phone.**
  Der! No phone!!

4. **Replace the phone.**
  This is not going to be as easy as it sounds. I looked in my jewelry box and I have $13.50. I found a birthday card from Nan with a $20 bill inside. There was $8.50 in change on my bedside table which brings my total worth to $42. So Mum and Dad will just buy me a new one. Right? Der!

Then I looked at some glitter eye shadow you can order online. It comes from New York in 3–4 working days.

Then I got bored.

Remember what it was like when you lost a baby tooth and your tongue just couldn’t help itself from exploring the new squishy gap in your gum? My fingers are like that. They’re out to explore without any supervision from me and keep reaching for the phone that isn’t there. Tap-tap-tapping on the non-existent keypad.

:( HLP me. Im dyng.

People who have had their arms and legs amputated say that sometimes it feels like the missing bit is still attached. As if the nerves from their limbs are still firing electronic impulses to their brains. Then they try to scratch an itch and just swipe at empty air.

My phone’s been amputated. I can feel it vibrating in my pocket, beep-beeping with a message or ringing in my ears, and I turn and reach for it, but it’s gone.

Gone for three whole hours. That’s one hundred and eighty minutes or 10,800 seconds. Your life could totally change in that time. That’s if you had any way of knowing.

One hundred and eighty minutes is also how long it took to watch the movie *Australia* (which seemed like for-ev-er, but when Bianca and I came out of the movieplex, the sun was,
amazingly, still out) and while I was in there with my phone switched off, checking out Nicole Kidman’s hair, my life could have changed forever and I wouldn’t have known.

That is entirely possible. Think about it.

In that time I could have had a call from Will saying that he loved me.

I told Will I loved him first. OK, everyone in the entire history of the earth knows that this is a BAD move. I didn’t mean to say it, but it just came out.

It was yesterday after school when I was watching Will surf down at Hammerhead. I was sitting on the sand minding our stuff. Not because I am a totally downtrodden female, but because I had just combed a mango and passion fruit treatment through my hair. I was enjoying the “luxurious tropical fragrance,” lying back and imagining I was in Tahiti. I didn’t want to go swimming and ruin the treatment with a massive salt blast. Salt is bad for you. That’s what they say. Bad for your hair. Bad for your heart. And, as I discovered, bad for your love life.

Because the thing is, it was just an ordinary summer afternoon at Hammerhead. The sky was an ordinary blue. The sand an ordinary beige. And as I watched Will trudging up the dune to where I was sitting, I just felt like my ordinary self.

And then Will leaned over me and when he did that, I saw close up that his golden curls were clumped together with tiny globs of salt. I saw that his eyes were the same soft gray as the rocks in the cliff. And then I noticed that the sun was shining through every drop of water on his skin and he seemed to be strung with fairy lights – a magical water sprite washed up on the incoming tide. And then I told him I loved him.

“Uh, towel,” says Will.

And then I ran and jumped in the sea, creating a giant mango and passion fruit conditioner slick that is probably still giving wading birds in New Zealand glossier and more manageable feathers.

Ever since then, I’ve been waiting to be given the kiss of life. And now my mobile, my lifeline, is gone and for the past three hours I’ve been drifting in an open sea.

PLZHLPme. Im gng under.

***

I’m sitting on my bed and I can hear Mum’s car coming up the driveway. It should be like the Hammerhead Surf Rescue Boat is coming to save me, but all I can think of is that when she knows I’ve lost my mobile, my mother will just turn around and row back to shore.

Before I tell her, I suppose I should retrace my steps to where I lost my bag. That’s what Dad will say when I tell him. Think logically, Elly. When did you have your handbag last?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is not in any way logical. And it’s not as if I haven’t been thinking about it.
Bianca and I were at the mall (Your Honor), and I know I had my bag when we were in our fave fashion store, Tiara, because I bought a braided belt with an adorable beaded buckle, paid for it, and put the belt and my wallet inside it. I remember admiring my butter-yellow squashy leather bag and thinking it reminded me of a cute Shar-Pei puppy. I gave it an affectionate pat. It really was the most good and cute and perfect bag.

The next thing I can remember (Officer) is sitting with Bianca on our usual bench. This is where we always sit to scope out the toxic tide of fashion disasters that slops up and down the mall escalators. I remember that I beat Bianca with a top score of seven positively identified fashion crimes:

1. White lace bra under black mesh tank top
   - Eeeyew! Do you even own a mirror?


4. Popped collar – Wassup? You have a rash on your neck, bro?

5. Fake tan lines on legs – Road to ruin.

6. Jeans with designer rips – Shanghai Seamstress Goes Postal With Box Cutter!

7. T-shirt with “Gold Coast” spelled out in sequins
   – Aaargh!

Seven is a good score. Not a perfect score of ten on the hideousness index, but still, a good effort. Bianca usually beats me. She can spot a fashion crime from miles away. It’s almost as if she has a built-in dreck-o-meter.

“Don’t look,” gasps Bianca. “White frilly socks and black patent ballet flats coming out of Cathedral Candles right this minute. I said, DON’T LOOK!”

At this point I swivel my head back around to see Bianca’s bright blue eyeballs tunneling right through the soft tissue of my brain and out the back of my head. The perpetrator is then expertly tracked without any idea she has been spotted. Bianca’s eyes are constantly sweeping the perimeters of the mall like floodlights on razor wire at a high security correctional facility. Even through massive sunglasses, no one, nothing, escapes her piercing gaze.

For instance – one day Bianca suspected I was wearing Disney Princess undies and barricaded me in my room until I agreed to change out of them.

“Are you in Year Nine or just nine years old?!“ she fumes through the door.

After the offending Sleeping Beauty cotton glitter
knickers had been hurled in the trash and I’d pulled on black stretch boy-legs, I was allowed to proceed. You have to respect a girl who cares that much. And you definitely don’t want her as an enemy.

Anyway, back to the mall. I’ll admit that I took advantage of the fact that Bianca was texting Jai nonstop. (Ever since she met him I have only had her full attention for random three-minute intervals.) So I was the one on sentry duty. I came, I saw, I cringed and took honors with, as I say, seven fully documented style transgressions. That’s how I know I still had my mobile phone. The ghastly photographs of each one are stored there.

After viewing the evidence Bianca had to admit she had been outclassed. And let me tell you, for Bianca, that was a biggie. She offered to buy me a juice from Hip Pip to celebrate and maybe ... maybe that’s where I lost my bag? During the resulting shock, because, believe me, Bianca NEVER admits ANYTHING.

Then we went back to Tiara one more time so Bianca could buy a silver glitter headband. After that, we left.

We boarded the bus outside the mall and when it accelerated into the middle lane before we had even sat down, I fell on top of Bianca.

“Ow! Watch it, Belly!” Bianca screeches.

Now, I have spoken to Bianca about this “Belly” business. And, you can add to that, “Nelly,” “Jelly” and “Smelly.” Also combinations of any of the above: “JellyBelly,” “SmellyNelly” and “JellySmellyBellyNellyElly.”

My full name is Eleanor. I will settle for Elly. My sister’s name is Matilda. She gets “Matty,” “Tilda,” “Tills” and will also accept “Tilly.” And that’s what our family calls her – Tilly.

Eleanor and Matilda are the names of Queens of England. Why did Mum and Dad choose these names? It’s a long, pathetic joke.

We live in the suburb of Oldcastle in the City of Britannia, New South Wales, Australia. Mum’s name is Elizabeth (commonly known as “Libby”) and Dad’s name is Richard (AKA “Rick”). So somewhere along the way Mum and Dad thought it would be hilarious to imagine that our house at 25 Buckingham Street, Oldcastle, Britannia was some kind of royal palace.

Elizabeth, Richard, Eleanor and Matilda, Buckingham Street, Oldcastle, Britannia. They even named our dog “Harry” and our cat “Camilla.” Geddit?

Our second name is Pickering. The Pickering coat of arms features an armored helmet and some kind of weird animal with its tongue sticking out. Dad’s got it framed on the bathroom wall. Or should I say, in his “throne room.”

I found out that the Pickerings originally lived on the side of a hill in Yorkshire, England. We live on the side of a hill in Oldcastle and it all looks like plain old suburbia to me. The only royal view from our house is the London Tavern and drive-thru bottle shop.

But everyone in the suburb of Oldcastle seems to be
in on this bad joke – we’ve got the Majestic Movieplex, Beefeater Butchery (and its famous “Sandringham” venison sausages), the Lionheart Dry Cleaners, Marquess Mini-mart and the Big-Ears Day Care Centre. Then there’s Henry, George and Mary Streets, Edward Court, Charles Drive and Victoria Square. Even at Oldcastle High the sports teams are Wessex, Stuart, Tudor and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Geddit?

Mostly I don’t. What has all this British monarchy stuff got to do with Oldcastle, a million miles away in Australia? I’ll bet that the Queen of England hasn’t got a corgi called “Pitjanjarra.”

When my mother first met Will, she laughed. For her it was one more joke to add to the rest. Prince William. The fact that Will has a full head of hair and the sweetest little sister named Pookie – and neither of them fly helicopters – doesn’t seem to matter. The entire Royal Family of Buckingham Street, Oldcastle, thinks my love life is a joke. And, for that matter, so does Bianca.

“When Prince Willy marries Princess Smelly,” laughs Bianca, “then you can be the Duke and Duchess of Smelly-Willy.”

Sometimes I wish I had a better BF than Bianca.

Which brings me back to the bus. It wasn’t till I was getting up from on top of Bianca, mad at myself for spilling pineapple and mint juice on my top, that I realized that my shoulder felt curiously light. There’s usually two pounds of stuff hanging off it.

When I realized my handbag was missing, I ran down the aisle waving madly at the bus driver to stop. Too late. We were barreling down the main road by then – trucks and cars on all sides – and before I knew it we were turning off towards Oldcastle. I was totally stressing out. I told Bianca that we should get off at the next stop and wait for the bus to take us back again to look for my bag.

“Your bag has totally been swiped by now, Elly, and your mobile is gone,” says Bianca. “It’s time you faced facts.”

I begged for her mobile to ring the mall and ask if anything had been found and handed in. Then we were at Bianca’s stop and she said she couldn’t hang around, her mum was expecting her home for lunch (!) and besides, her phone battery was dead (!). With that, she was gone, and just as the bus door was closing behind her, I realized that I had no $$$ whatsoever. The only thing I could do was come back here to Buckingham Palace and wait.

Two things occur to me now as I sit in The Dungeon (AKA my bedroom):

1. How come Bianca’s phone was dead, when she’d just finished a long convo with Jai and I didn’t hear any beeps from the battery winding down?

2. Why was Bianca’s mother expecting her home for lunch when everyone knows that Bianca’s mother has not prepared a meal, or eaten one, since Bianca was born?
I know the truth. Bianca was rushing off to meet Jai and had care factor zero about my bag and phone. She’s right that I have to face facts. And the first major fact is that I really do need a new BF.

Uh-oh! I can hear the Queen Mother walking up the hall and greeting His Excellency the Mutt.


Good dog.”

Then the cat is acknowledged, no doubt with a dismissive, regal wave.

“Camilla! Shoo! Get off that couch. You’ve left fur all over it.”

Then, finally it’s my turn.

“Elly. Eleanor. Are you home? I’ve been trying to call you on your mobile,” yells Mum.

All jokes aside, this is going to be right royal torture.

Saturday. 7 p.m.
Seven hours PM.

It’s now seven hours since I lost my mobile at the mall and as I predicted, I am dead. Dead to my family. Dead to the world. Dead, as Nan might say, as a doornail.

(BTW: What is a “doornail” anyway and why is it so dead? I Google it and find out that on big doors in medieval times the heavy metal knocker was banged against the head of a nail. Banged so often that the head of the nail was probably as dead as.)

:(

I’m in my dungeon feeling as if my head has been banged repeatedly. They all lined up to have a go. The first blow came from my mother.

“Elly! You are so careless! Stupid!” she yells. “Are you