

I've never let my school interfere with my education.

—Mark Twain



A WAVERLY OWL DOES NOT DISCUSS
HALF-NAKEDNESS WITH STRANGERS.

Somebody's plaid Jack Spade duffel slammed into Jenny Humphrey's shin and jerked her out of a dream. The 10 A.M. Amtrak Empire Service to Rhinecliff, New York, had stopped in Poughkeepsie, and a tall, twentyish, stubbly chinned boy in dark brown square Paul Smith glasses and a Decemberists T-shirt was standing over her.

"Anybody sitting here?" he asked.

"Nope," she responded groggily, scooting over. He threw his bag under the seat and settled in next to Jenny.

The train groaned along at about a mile an hour. Jenny sniffed at the stale, slightly sweaty train car air and jiggled her foot, thinking about how she was going to be super-late for check-in at Waverly Academy. She would've been early if her dad, Rufus, had driven her up here in his blue beater Volvo

wagon—he'd practically begged Jenny to let him—but Jenny hadn't wanted her unshaven, peacenik father to drop her off at her brand-new, haute boarding school. Knowing him, he'd have tried to start up an impromptu poetry slam with her new classmates and shown off old pictures of Jenny when she was a lame seventh grader and wore nothing but fluorescent green and orange Old Navy fleeces. Um, no thanks.

"Going to Waverly?" the boy asked. He raised his eyebrows at the *Waverly Academy Guide to Ethics* that sat unopened in Jenny's lap.

Jenny brushed a brown tendril out of her eyes. "Yeah," she answered. "I'm starting there this year." She couldn't hide the enthusiasm in her voice—she was so excited to start her brand-new boarding school that she felt all jiggly inside, like she had to pee.

"Freshman?"

"Nope. Sophomore. I used to go to Constance Billard. It's in the city." Jenny was a little pleased that she had a relatively chic past to refer to, or that it at least sounded that way.

"So you wanted a change of pace, or what?" He fiddled with the strap of his worn leather watchband.

Jenny shrugged. This boy looked like he was her brother Dan's age. Dan had just taken off for Evergreen College on the West Coast two days ago, taking nothing with him except for two duffel bags, his Mac G4 laptop, and two cartons of cigarettes. Jenny, on the other hand, had already shipped four over-size boxes and a couple of giant duffels to Waverly, and had lugged a giant suitcase and an overstuffed bag with her. In her

hyperexcited preparation for boarding school, she had practically bought out the hair, cosmetics, and feminine products aisles at CVS—who knew what she’d need at boarding school! She’d also gone on a buying spree at Club Monaco, J.Crew, and Barneys with the credit card her dad had lent her for back-to-school shopping. “Kinda,” she finally answered.

The truth was, she’d been asked to leave Constance—apparently because she was considered a “bad influence” on the other girls. Jenny hadn’t thought she was being a bad influence at all—she was just trying to have fun, like every other girl at school. But somehow, all of her moments of extreme fun had also been highly publicized and embarrassing: a picture of her boobs in a sports bra had shown up in a magazine (she’d thought it was a sportswear model shoot), a Webcast of her practically naked butt had been spread around the school, and she’d made some bad decisions about which boys she should make out with at various parties—and of course everybody had found out.

The final straw had come after Jenny had spent a night at the Plaza Hotel with her brother’s old band, the Raves. A photograph of her leaving the Plaza in nothing but a fluffy white bathrobe had appeared online on Page Six the next day. Rumors had flown that Jenny was sleeping with *all* the Raves, *including* her brother. Ew! Concerned parents quickly called up the Constance headmistress, aflutter about Jenny’s promiscuity. After all, Constance had a reputation for excellence to uphold!

Although Jenny hadn’t even been with *one* Rave, let alone all of them, she hadn’t exactly wanted to *deny* the rumor—she kind

of loved that everyone was talking about her. So as she'd sat with the Constance Billard headmistress, Ms. McLean, in her patriotic red, white, and blue office back in the city, Jenny had realized something huge: it wasn't the end of the world to get kicked out of Constance. This was her chance to start over, to reinvent herself as the blunder-free sophisticate she'd always wanted to be. And where was the classiest place to start over? Boarding school, of course.

Much to her dad's chagrin—she was pretty sure Rufus wanted her to live with him in their Upper West Side apartment forever—Jenny had rabidly researched a whole bunch of schools and toured a few. The first school had turned out to have a strict disciplinary code and had been too boring for words. Within minutes of getting to the second school, on the other hand, she'd been offered Ecstasy and had taken her top off. But just like the third bed for Goldilocks, the third school that Jenny had tested, Waverly, was just right.

Well, to tell the truth, she hadn't actually visited Waverly—she'd run out of time, applied way past the deadline, and taken some creative liberties with her application—but she'd looked at thousands of pictures online and memorized all the building names and campus maps. She was certain it would be perfect.

"I used to go to Waverly's rival," the boy said, pulling a book out of his bag. "St. Lucius. Our school hated your school."

"Oh," Jenny replied quietly, sinking into her seat.

"I'm kidding." He smiled and turned back to his book. Jenny noticed it was Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, one of her dad's favorites. According to Rufus, it had been banned because

it was too right-on in its vicious social commentary about love and sex in New York City. Hello, sex scenes. Jenny felt her cheeks growing pink.

Then she realized: she was acting like her old, unsophisticated self. And one thing was for sure: Old Jenny obviously wasn't working for her.

Jenny studied the boy carefully. She didn't know him and would probably never see him again, so why did she care what he thought of her? At Waverly, Jenny was going to be stunning, amazing New Jenny, the girl who belonged at the center of everything.

So why not become New Jenny starting *right now*?

Mustering up her courage, she uncrossed her arms to reveal her rather large double-D chest, which seemed even bigger, since she was barely five feet tall, and sat up straight. "So, um, any good parts in that book?"

The boy looked puzzled, his eyes darting back and forth from Jenny's innocent face to her chest to the worn paperback's cover. Finally, he wrinkled his nose and answered, "Maybe."

"Will you read some to me?"

The boy licked his lips. "Okay. But only if you read me a line from that book you've got there first." He tapped the maroon cover of her beloved *Waverly Academy Guide to Ethics*.

"Sure." Jenny opened the rule book. She'd received it a few weeks ago and had devoured it cover to cover. She loved its plush leather binding, its creamy paper stock, and the nursery-rhymey, slightly condescending, slightly British style in which it was written. It sounded so wonderfully proper and upscale,

and Jenny was sure that by the time she'd even spent a few weeks at Waverly, she'd be as polished, graceful, and perfect as Amanda Hearst, the young socialite, or the late Carolyn Bessette Kennedy.

She cleared her throat. "Here's a good one. 'Waverly Owls may not dance in a sexually suggestive manner in public.'" She laughed. Did that mean they could dance in a sexually suggestive manner in *private*?

"Do they really refer to you as Waverly Owls?" The boy leaned over to look at the page. He smelled like Ivory soap.

"Yes!" As she said it, Jenny grinned. She, Jenny Humphrey, was going to be a Waverly Owl!

She turned the page. "Waverly Owls are not permitted sexual intimacy. A Waverly Owl must not engage in activities that might be dangerous, such as jumping off the Richards Bridge. A Waverly Owl does not wear spaghetti straps or miniskirts above midhigh."

The boy snickered. "When they're talking about a girl, shouldn't it be an Owlette?"

Jenny slammed the book shut. "Okay. Now it's your turn."

"Well, I just started, so I'll read from the beginning." The boy smirked and opened to the first page. "From the very beginning, I have trained myself not to want anything too badly."

Funny, Jenny thought. She had the opposite problem—she wanted everything *way* too badly.

"I was corrupt," he continued. "Corrupt from the start."

"I'm corrupt!" Jenny blurted out. "But not from the start." Old Jenny couldn't believe what New Jenny was saying.

“Yeah?” He closed the book. “I’m Sam, by the way.”

“Jenny.” She looked down to see if Sam wanted her to shake his hand, but it was still wedged under his leg. They both smiled awkwardly.

“So, does your corruptness have anything to do with why you’re leaving New York for boarding school?” Sam asked.

“Maybe.” Jenny shrugged, trying to be coy and mysterious at the same time.

“Spill.”

She let out a sigh. She could admit the truth, but *Everybody thought I was sleeping with all the guys in this band, and I didn’t deny it* sounded kind of slutty. Definitely not mysterious or chic. So instead she decided to take some creative liberties. “Well, I was in a sort of risqué fashion show.”

Sam’s eyes glittered with interest. “What do you mean?”

She thought for a moment. “Well, for one look, I just had this bra-and-underwear set on. And heels. I guess it was a little too much for some people.”

This wasn’t entirely a lie. Jenny *had* modeled last year—for a Les Best spread in *W* magazine. Clothed. But clothes didn’t seem too interesting at the moment.

“Really?” Sam cleared his throat and readjusted his glasses. “Have you heard of Tinsley Carmichael? You should know her.”

“Who?”

“Tinsley Carmichael. She goes to Waverly. I go to Bard now, but I met her a couple times at parties last year. . . . She came to school in her own seaplane. But someone told me she decided to leave Waverly because Wes Anderson offered her the lead in his next movie.”

Jenny shrugged, feeling strangely competitive with—and a wee bit excited about—this Tinsley girl. She sounded like the ideal New Jenny.

The exhausted-looking train conductor stomped down the aisle and grabbed the ticket off the top of her seat. “Rhinecliff, next.”

“Oh. This is me.” Jenny took a deep breath. It was really happening! She looked out the window, expecting to see something truly magical, but saw only lush green trees, a wide field, and telephone poles. Still, trees! A field! The only field in Manhattan was Sheep Meadow in Central Park, and it was always filled with drug dealers and really skinny half-naked girls sunbathing.

She stood and reached for her red and white polka-dotted soft-shell LeSportsac bag and the old-school brown Samsonite suitcase she’d borrowed from her dad. It had a big HUGS NOT BOMBS sticker next to the handles. Not very New Jenny. As she struggled to bring the case to the ground, Sam stood to help her, pulling it effortlessly off the rack.

“Thanks,” she said, blushing.

“No problem.” He pushed the hair out of his eyes. “So, do I get to see pictures of you at . . . at the fashion show?”

“If you search online,” Jenny lied. She stared out the window and saw, across a field, an old rooster weathervane on the top of a large, faded farmhouse. “The designer’s name is, um, Rooster.”

“Never heard of him.”

“He’s kind of obscure,” Jenny answered quickly, noting that

the polished, pink Polo wearing boy sitting behind them was definitely listening to their conversation. Jenny tried to see what he was typing on his BlackBerry, but he covered the screen when he noticed her watching him.

“You . . . you should come to Bard sometime,” Sam continued. “We have some killer parties. Great DJs and stuff.”

“Okay,” Jenny replied over her shoulder, raising her eyebrows just a touch. “Although, you know, a Waverly Owl isn’t allowed to dance in a sexually suggestive manner.”

“I won’t tell on you,” he answered, not taking his eyes off her chest.

“Bye, Sam,” Jenny waved, using her most flirty, musical voice. She stepped off the train onto the platform and sucked in a deep breath of fresh country air. *Whoa.*

New Jenny would take a little getting used to!



RyanReynolds: Hey, Benster. Welcome back, girl!

BennyCunningham: Hey, sweetie! How's life?

RyanReynolds: I had the worst ride up here in our plane. My dad has this maniac pilot and they were yakking at each other the whole time and going faster and faster. . . .

BennyCunningham: Next time you should fly with me. I'll let you snuggle with me under my pashmina.

RyanReynolds: God, you're a tease. Hey, did u c Callie's pic in Atlanta Magazine?

BennyCunningham: No, but I heard it nearly ruined her mom. She had to do damage control on Good Morning Atlanta!

RyanReynolds: Yeah, C looks bombed in the pic.

BennyCunningham: Is she still with EZ? I'm going to jump him if she's not.

RyanReynolds: Dunno. Someone told me they saw him dancing with some gorgeous girl with really blue eyes and black dreads in Lexington.

BennyCunningham: Sorta sounds like Tinsley. Except for the dreads.

RyanReynolds: I know. Too bad she won't be at the party tonight.

BennyCunningham: Seriously.



A WAVERLY OWL SHOULD RESIST THE URGE
TO LICK HER BOYFRIEND FROM HEAD TO TOE.

Callie Vernon set her luggage down in the entranceway to Dumbarton dorm room 303 and looked around. The room was exactly as she, Brett, and Tinsley had left it—except for the lack of empty Diet Coke bottles, Parliament butt-filled ashtrays, and CD cases strewn all over the room. Last fall, because they'd only been sophomores, Callie and her two best friends, Brett Messerschmidt and Tinsley Carmichael, had been assigned a horrible, cramped room with only one window. But then Tinsley had bribed three dorky senior girls to switch with them the first week of school by promising them invites to the best secret parties. They'd wanted this room because it was bigger than most, with casement windows overlooking the Hudson River, and because it was close to the fire escape—ideal for sneaking out after curfew.

Brett hadn't arrived back at school yet, and Tinsley had been expelled at the end of school last year. They'd been caught on Ecstasy in the middle of the rugby fields at five in the morning by Mr. Purcell, the uptight physics teacher, who liked going running with his three impeccably groomed giant schnauzers before sunrise. It was the first time they'd ever tried E, and it had taken them a moment to stop laughing at the ridiculous-looking dogs before realizing what enormous trouble they were in. The girls had all been called into the headmaster's office separately—first Tinsley, then Callie, then Brett—but the only one to get in any real trouble was Tinsley, who was promptly booted out of Waverly.

Callie caught a glimpse of herself in the just-Windexed mirror over the antique oak bureau and straightened her white Jill Stuart shell top and pleated lemon-yellow Tocca skirt. She'd lost a few pounds over the summer and the side zipper kept sliding around to her belly button. Callie was thin now, maybe a little too thin, and freckly from the summer. Her hair was long and shaggy, and her round, hazel eyes were fanned by thick, blond-tipped eyelashes. She puckered her lips, blew a kiss at the mirror, and felt an anxious flutter in her chest.

All this summer, Callie's mind had spun, thinking about why Tinsley had been expelled and she and Brett hadn't been. Had Brett set it up that way? Brett was supersecretive about her life at home—her mom and dad never came to Parents' Day, and Brett never invited anybody to her house in East Hampton for long weekends. Tinsley had once dropped a hint that Brett had some family issues she didn't want anybody to know about.

Could Brett really have orchestrated Tinsley's expulsion so she wouldn't expose her secrets? It sounded totally soap-operaish, but Brett was so melodramatic sometimes that Callie wouldn't put it past her.

Callie nestled into her desk chair, actually glad to be back at school. Beyond not talking to her two best friends—she hadn't heard a peep from either of them—her summer had been a disaster. First, there'd been the *Atlanta Magazine* photo of Callie at Club Compound, dancing on a table with a vanilla martini in her hand. The caption read, *Overserved and underage: Is this appropriate behavior for a governor's daughter?* Needless to say, that hadn't gone over well with her mother's conservative Georgian voters. Oops.

After that nightmare, Callie had flown to her family's chalet in Barcelona—Mr. Vernon was part Spanish and spent his summers working on real estate deals in Europe. She had hoped that Barcelona would be the perfect backdrop for a romantic rendezvous with her boyfriend, Easy Walsh. But that visit had been anything but romantic. Try freaky.

"Hey," came a gravelly voice behind her.

Callie wheeled around. Easy. There he was, all rumpled, sexy six feet of him, standing in her doorway, looking more gorgeous than ever.

"Oh!" She felt her palms get slick with sweat.

"How are you?" he asked, pulling at the worn hem of his polo shirt. His glossy almost-black hair curled around his neck and ears.

"Confused" would have been a reasonable answer. The last

time she'd seen Easy was when she'd dropped him off at the Barcelona airport. They hadn't kissed goodbye, and they'd barely even spoken the whole last day of his visit.

"Fine," she replied cautiously. "How did you get in here? Did Angelica see you?" Her dorm mistress, Angelica Pardee, was really strict about allowing boys in the all-girls' dorm except during "visitation," which was only for an hour between sports practice and dinner.

"You look too skinny," Easy said softly, ignoring Callie's questions.

Callie frowned. "Do you want to get in trouble on the first day of school?"

"Your boobs are going away," he continued.

"God," she muttered in annoyance. The truth was, she hadn't been hungry all summer—not even for Barcelona-style paella, her favorite. She was too nervous to eat, or to do much of anything, really. The last few weeks in Spain she'd spent on the couch, looking like an unstructured slob, wearing her slightly ragged, white Dior string bikini and some old ripped batik sarong she'd picked up for next to nothing in a Barcelona outdoor market, watching hours and hours of *The Surreal Life* in Spanish. And she didn't even speak much Spanish. "What are you doing back so soon?"

Easy was usually fashionably late to Waverly check-in—another no-no—because he arrived in a tractor-trailer with his Thoroughbred, Credo, who he kept on campus.

"Credo's coming next week, so there was no reason for me to be late."

He looked at Callie. They'd been together since last fall, but he'd had a hard time getting psyched to see her back at school after his parents had received an angry note from Dean Marymount over the summer saying he'd be watching Easy carefully this year. Apparently there were rules to uphold, and just because Easy was a legacy—his grandfather, father, and three older brothers had all attended Waverly—didn't mean he could bend those rules. So instead of heading up to school a week late with Credo, Easy had flown alone on a chartered plane from Kentucky to New York with leather reclining seats and unlimited champagne. Sounds great, right? Except it wasn't exactly what Easy had had in mind.

Easy regularly fantasized about getting kicked out of Waverly Academy—until he remembered his father's bargain. If Easy graduated from Waverly, he could take a postgraduate year in Paris. His father even had a big apartment in the Latin Quarter all ready for Easy's year abroad. Paris—how cool would that be? He'd drink absinthe, paint street scenes from his bedroom window, and ride along the Seine on an ancient, rickety Peugeot bike, a Gauloise hanging from his mouth. He could smoke his brains out and nobody would give him shit for it!

"You going to the party at Richards' lounge tonight?" Callie asked.

Easy shrugged. "Not sure." He stood just inside the door frame.

Callie pulled a foot out of her pointy-toed Burberry loafer and rolled her ballerina-pink painted toes against the floor. A horrible feeling of dread washed over her. *Why* wouldn't Easy want to go to the first party of the year? *Everybody* went to the

first party of the year. Was he seeing someone else? Someone he wanted to be alone with on the first night of school?

“Well, I’m going,” she said quickly, crossing her arms.

Neither one had made a move toward the other. But with his mussed hair, broad shoulders, and golden-brown forearms, Easy looked so irresistible, Callie was dying to lick him from head to toe.

“Did you have a good summer after Spain?” she squeaked, trying to sound as indifferent as possible.

“I guess. Lexington was ass-boring as usual.” He pulled a toothpick from behind his ear and placed it between his slightly chapped lips.

Callie leaned against her antique white-painted wood bed frame. His visit to Spain had been tainted from the start. Easy had had to fly coach class, and when he’d arrived, he’d been terse and gruff and had headed straight to the bar—not one of those cute little outdoor cafés straight out of *The Sun Also Rises*, but simply the closest bar possible, at the airport. Then he’d passed out on the Vernons’ couch, which was a real problem since Callie’s dad *needed* to sit on that couch to watch the international feed of CNN every single minute he wasn’t working.

Callie tilted her hips forward and chewed on her freshly manicured thumbnail. “Well, that’s nice,” she responded finally. She wished she could just wrap her arms around him and kiss him everywhere, but she couldn’t exactly do that when he hadn’t even tried to hug her hello.

Then she spied a familiar figure behind Easy and her heart started racing.

“Mr. Walsh!” crowed Angelica Pardee, Dumbarton’s dorm

mistress. Angelica wasn't even thirty, but she seemed to be in a hurry to enter middle age. Today she was wearing a thin, shapeless tan cardigan, a straight, knee-length black skirt, and sensible black Easy Spirits. Her calves were a little veiny and way too bluish-white, and she wore no makeup. "Do I have to report you already?"

Easy jumped. "I'm sorry," he apologized, dazedly pressing his hand to his head, as if he had amnesia. "I haven't been here in so long, and, like, I forgot which dorm I was in." He looked across the room, directly into Callie's eyes, and she felt her arms goose-bump.

"See you later?" she finally mouthed.

He nodded ever so slightly.

"Stables?" she whispered.

"Tomorrow?" he mouthed back.

"Why not tonight?" Callie wanted to ask. But she didn't.

"Mr. *Walsb!*" Angelica practically spat, gripping the cuff of his shirt. Her face was an abnormal red.

"Okay!" Easy yelped. "I *said* I was leaving."

Angelica shook her head and ushered Easy down the hall.

Callie turned and stared out the window. The abandoned stables were where they used to go last year to fool around. Only a few students kept horses at school, so several of the stalls were always empty. She hated that she had had to suggest they meet there, and not the other way around.

Droves of freshmen lumbered up Dumbarton's steps, carrying way too much luggage. Callie noticed how overwhelmed the girls seemed. She could relate. There were so many things about boarding school that you couldn't plan for. They'd soon

discover that they didn't need half their shit and that they had forgotten the really important stuff—like empty shampoo bottles to hide vodka in. She watched the throng of freshman girls part as Easy strolled down the Dumbarton steps, nodding to the new, innocent faces. God, it was hard dating such a flirt.

She put her head in her hands. It was so obvious what had gone wrong in Spain. The last night they'd spent together, she'd admitted something to Easy that was so big and so *scary* for her to say. And what had been his answer? Nothing. Silence.

Callie sighed. They'd have to talk about it tomorrow, although she hoped they'd be doing a lot more than just talking.



BennyCunningham: My brother's friend at Exeter told me there's a new girl at Waverly who's a stripper from NYC.

HeathFerro: !?!

BennyCunningham: Yep. Some club named . . . Hen Party? Chicken Hut? Horse Stable? I think in Brooklyn? I had my cousin who lives in the Village look it up—it's the kind of place where u take it all off. Thong included.

HeathFerro: When can I meet her?

BennyCunningham: Heath, you're nasty.

HeathFerro: Don't you know it, baby!



A WAVERLY OWL SHOULD KEEP HER
GRANNY BRAS HIDDEN AT ALL TIMES.

“Right here is fine,” Jenny told the cabdriver as soon as she spied the discreet maroon sign reading WAVERLY ACADEMY hanging from a tree next to a tiny, one-story brick building. Waverly wasn’t far from the train station, but Jenny hadn’t been able to get here fast enough.

“You sure?” The cabdriver turned around, revealing a thin beaky nose and a faded light blue Yankees cap. “Because the front office is—”

“I’m a student here,” Jenny interrupted, feeling a thrill ripple through her chest as she spoke. “I know where the front office is.”

The cabdriver threw up his hands in defeat. “You’re the boss.” Jenny handed him a twenty, stepped out of the cab, and looked around.

She was *here*. Waverly. The grass seemed greener, the trees taller, and the sky cleaner and bluer than anywhere she'd ever been before. There were lush evergreens on all sides, and on her right was a wide, cobblestone path snaking up a hill. A green field spread out to her left, and in the distance a few boys in Abercrombie fatigue shorts were kicking around a soccer ball. The whole place *smelled* of boarding school. Like the deep woods, which she'd only been in a few times, before she knew better than to accompany her dad and his kooky anarchist buddies on camping trips in southern Vermont.

A cream-colored Mercedes convertible swept past her. She heard a stately clock tower bong out one o'clock.

"Yes," she whispered, hugging herself. She had definitely arrived.

The truth was, she'd wanted to get out of the cab because she couldn't wait a second longer to plant her feet on Waverly ground, not because she knew exactly where she was going. Staring at the little brick building beside her, she realized that ivy had grown over the windows and the door was rusted shut. This definitely wasn't the front office, where she needed to check in. Another car, this one a battleship-gray Bentley, passed her. Jenny decided to follow the parade of luxury cars.

She dragged her bags up the freshly mowed hill, her kitten heels sinking into the slightly wet, springy lawn. A running track circled off to her right, flanked by tall white bleachers. A few girls were running briskly around the track, their ponytails bouncing. At the top of the hill, above the dark green trees, she could see a white church spire and the slate roofs of some more

redbrick buildings. The boys with the soccer ball had stopped playing and were now standing together, staring in her direction. Were they staring at *her*?

“D’you need a ride?” a male voice interrupted her thoughts. Jenny looked over, and saw a tan, middle-aged man with dazzling white teeth hanging out the driver-side window of a silver Cadillac Escalade. She could see her reflection in his Ray-Ban aviator sunglasses. She looked awkward and silly wearing a too-tight Lacoste cotton polo shirt and dragging her luggage up the hill in a pair of pointy pink kitten-heel sandals. She’d bought the shirt at Bloomingdale’s because she’d been sure it would make her feel like she absolutely belonged at boarding school, and she had gone back to visit the sandals several times before they finally went on sale so she could buy them.

“Um, sure. I’m going to the front office.” She slid into the backseat of the SUV, which smelled like new car. A dirty-blond boy with chiseled features was sitting in the passenger seat looking sulky, but he didn’t twist around to speak to her.

“I don’t know, Heath,” the man told the boy quietly. “You may not be able to have the party—your mother and I might need the Woodstock house that weekend.”

“Motherfucker,” the boy hissed under his breath. His father sighed.

Jenny barely acknowledged the boy’s rudeness. She only had ears for one word: party.

She felt funny, though, asking the boy about it, since he seemed pretty pissed off. The car stopped at an enormous redbrick building with a small maroon sign next to the stone path-

way that said FRONT OFFICE. Jenny squeaked her thanks, grabbed her bags, and made a beeline for the door.

Inside, the waiting room was ballroom size, with shiny floors made of dark cherry wood. A large crystal chandelier hung from the double-height ceiling. Four butter-colored leather couches were arranged in a square around a heavy teak coffee table, and a beautiful, amber-haired boy was stretched out on one of them, reading *FHM* and eating a bag of Fritos.

“Can I help you?” someone asked behind her. Jenny jumped. She turned and saw a Laura Ashley-clad older woman with a very hairsprayed gray bob and watery blue eyes wearing a name tag that read HELLO, MY NAME IS MRS. TULLINGTON sitting behind a desk with a little white sign that read NEW STUDENTS’ CHECK-IN.

“Hi!” Jenny peeped. “I’m Jennifer Humphrey. I’m a new student!”

She studied the *Welcome to Waverly* schedule that was taped to the desk. School didn’t officially begin until tomorrow night at the orientation welcome dinner, but sports team tryouts would take place tomorrow during the day. Mrs. Tullington typed some information into a pristine, gunmetal-gray Sony laptop, and then she frowned. “There’s a problem.”

Jenny stared at her blankly. *Problem?* There were no problems in magical Waverly land! Look at how gorgeous that Frito-eating boy was!

“We have you down as a boy,” Mrs. Tullington continued.

“Wait, what?” Jenny snapped back to consciousness. “Did you say a *boy*?”

“Yes . . . we have you here as *Mr.* Jennifer Humphrey.” The

older woman seemed flustered, flipping papers back and forth. "Some students have very old family names, you see, and maybe the admissions committee thought Jennifer was—"

"Oh," Jenny replied self-consciously, twisting around to see if the boy on the couch had heard, but he was gone. All the Waverly mail she'd gotten had been addressed to a Mr. Jennifer Humphrey. She'd assumed it was just a typo. What a dumb thing to assume. *So* Old Jenny. "What does that mean? I had all my bags shipped to the . . . the Richards dorm, I think it was?"

"Yes, but that's the boys' dorm." Mrs. Tullington explained this slowly, as if Jenny didn't get it. "We'll have to find another space for you." She flipped through some papers. "The girls' dorms are all filled up. . . ." She picked up the phone. "We'll sort this out. But go see if your things are in Richards dorm. They would have been sent to the lounge on the first floor—that's where all mailed luggage is held. It's down the path to your right, fourth building. There's a sign. We'll send someone for you once we figure this out."

"Okay," Jenny replied happily, picturing all the hot, shirtless preppy boys she was about to see lounging around Richards. "No problem."

"The main door should be open. But don't go into any of the rooms. They're off limits!" Mrs. Tullington called after her.

"Of course," Jenny agreed. "Thank you!"

Jenny stood on the stone porch of the front office. From studying the campus maps, she'd learned that Waverly's dorms, chapel, auditorium, and classrooms were all laid out in a big circle, with the soccer fields in the center. At the back of the

circle were the crew houses, the Hudson River, the art gallery, the botany labs, and the library. All of the buildings seemed to be made of brick, with old, heavy windows and white trim.

Strolling excitedly toward the dorms, Jenny had to will herself not to skip. Girls in beat-up Citizens jeans and ragged gros-grain flip-flops were spilling out of Mercedes SUVs and Audi wagons, hugging other girls and talking excitedly about what had happened over the summer at their country houses on Martha's Vineyard and in the Hamptons. Boys in zip-up hooded sweatshirts and camo shorts were ramming into each other with their shoulders. One guy carrying a Louis Vuitton duffel shouted, "I did so much E this summer, my brain is fried!"

Jenny felt her body stiffen, suddenly intimidated. Everyone looked so beautiful—scrubbed and clean and fashionable without even *trying* to be, which was so much cooler than spending hours primping, like she usually did—and like they'd known one another forever. Jenny took a deep breath and continued along the path.

Then, out of nowhere, a giant potatolike thing swooped down, making a horrific cawing noise, and flew about an inch from Jenny's face.

"Aghh!" she screamed, swatting in front of her.

She watched as the thing soared into a tree. Scary! It looked like a rat on steroids.

Behind her, Jenny heard a snicker and wheeled around. All the girls were still talking to one another, but two boys in backwards W baseball caps were sitting on a stone wall, watching. Then she noticed that in her fright, she'd dropped her over-

packed suitcase on the path, and it had sprung open. *Oh, God.* Her giant nude extra-support bras, the kind with the extra hook-and-eye clasp and padded straps that she had to use when she had her period, were all over the ground. They were bras a huge, dumpy grandmother might wear.

She quickly shoved the bras back in her suitcase, peeking to see if the two boys sitting on the wall had noticed. They were already greeting some other guy in a white baseball cap, doing that hand-grab half-hug thing that guys do, not paying any attention to Jenny. With the fresh air and lush, rambling scenery, maybe oversized boobs and bras weren't the kind of thing Waverly kids noticed. . . .

Then the new arrival turned to Jenny and touched the brim of his ratty white baseball cap with his index finger. He gave her a wink, as if to say, *The air might be fresh, but we're not totally blind.*



WAVERLY OWLS KNOW THAT CLEAN LUNGS
MAKE FOR HEALTHY HOOTING!

Brandon Buchanan sat on one of his Samsonites and stared at Heath Ferro. No matter when he arrived on campus, he always saw Heath first. Even though they were roommates, Brandon found Heath really annoying most of the time.

“I brought a carton of smokes,” Heath bragged as he unzipped his black medium-size Tumi duffel and showed Brandon the edge of the Camel “unfiltered” box. They were in Richards’ lounge, waiting to get room assignments. It was just a normal common room—the meeting spot where the guys watched *SportsCenter*, shared sausage pizzas from Ritoli’s, and flirted with cute girls during visiting hour—but still, the lounge felt English and regal. The cream-colored plaster ceilings were fifteen feet high, with dark wooden beams, and there were comfortable, worn leather armchairs scattered all over the

place. An old cabinet TV that got three network stations and, randomly, ESPN, loomed in the corner. On the floor lay a huge, ornate Oriental carpet. Careless cigarette burn holes made the rug look even more historic.

“That’ll last you about a week,” Brandon scoffed, pushing his short wavy golden-brown hair back into its deliberately tousled place. Heath smoked like a fiend right outside Richards even though smoking was forbidden on campus, but the faculty constantly looked the other way. It might’ve been because of Heath’s stunning good looks—he was tall, lean, and athletic, with gold-flecked green eyes, sharp cheekbones, and shaggy dark blond hair. But more likely, it was Heath’s family that kept him out of trouble. Heath’s father had donated four and a half million dollars for the Olympic-size natatorium and another million for a three-floor addition to the renovated botany library, so Heath could pretty much do as he damn well pleased and never get so much as a warning.

“You bring your weird girly cream with you this year?” Heath teased.

“It’s moisturizer,” Brandon clarified.

“It’s moisturizer,” Heath echoed in a high-pitched voice.

So what if Brandon took good care of his skin? And liked nice clothes and shoes and liked his wavy hair to be just so? He was neurotic about his height—he was only five-eight—and shaved his chest because he hated the tiny little hairs that grew in the caved-in part of his breastbone. His less-clean friends busted on him to no end. But so what?

“Who you think they’re gonna room us with?” Heath asked.

“Don’t know. Maybe Ryan. Unless he gets a single again.” Ryan Reynolds’s father had invented the soft contact lens and openly used his wealth as leverage to his son’s advantage. Lots of kids’ parents bribed the school, but usually it was kept a secret.

Heath snickered. “Maybe you’ll get paired up with Walsh.”

“Nah, even the administration knows better than that,” Brandon replied. Just the sound of that name—Walsh, as in Easy Walsh—made Brandon’s blood curdle.

“So, how’s Natasha?” Heath recited her name with a bad Russian accent.

Brandon sighed. Last April he had started going out with Natasha Wood, who went to Millbrook Academy, after Easy stole his old girlfriend, Callie Vernon, from him. “We broke up two weeks ago.”

“No shit. You cheat?”

“Nah.”

“What, then?”

Brandon shrugged. They’d broken up because he was still moony over Callie. He and Natasha had been making out on the Harwich main beach in Cape Cod, and Brandon had accidentally called Natasha Callie by mistake. Oops. Natasha had climbed up the rickety wooden lifeguard stand and refused to come down until Brandon went away. Forever.

“Whose stuff is that?” Heath looked across the room and kicked his feet up on the brown tweed couch. There was a whole pile of bright pink canvas L.L. Bean bags that didn’t have an owner yet.

Brandon shrugged. "Don't know." He picked up one of the tags. "Jennifer Humphrey."

"There's going to be a guy named Jennifer Humphrey in this dorm? Freaky."

"No, *I'm* Jennifer."

A little curly-haired girl in a sweet light purple Marc Jacobs knockoff skirt stood in the common-room doorway. Brandon knew the skirt was a knockoff, because he'd bought Natasha the real deal this summer. This Jennifer had a tiny upturned nose and pink cheeks and wore little skinny-heeled pink shoes with tiny cut-outs at the front so he could just glimpse her toes peeking through.

"Hi," she said simply.

"Uh," Brandon stammered. "You're not . . . supposed to be—"

"No . . . actually . . . I am." She laughed a little. "I was assigned to this dorm."

"So you're *Mister* Jennifer Humphrey?" Heath butted in, crossing one foot over the other.

"Yeah. Waverly had me down as a guy."

Brandon had a pretty good idea what Heath was thinking right then: *With tits like those, you certainly don't look like a guy.* God, his friends annoyed him sometimes. "I'm Brandon." He offered his hand politely, stepping in front of Heath.

Jenny tugged at her skirt. "Hello." She felt a little flustered. Of the seven boys who were milling around the lounge with their stuff, she'd picked out the two cutest. Brandon was gorgeous, with his flawless skin, perfect dark gold hair, and long, luxurious eyelashes, but he was prettier than she was! Jenny

liked boys who looked a bit rougher and messier, like the one sitting behind Brandon, whose dirty blond hair was slightly greasy and whose Kelly green oxford shirt looked slept in. She stared at him again, realizing that he was the boy who'd given her the ride up the hill. The one who was having the party. Didn't he recognize her?

"I'm just supposed to wait here until they figure out what to do with me." She looked directly behind Brandon, trying to jog his hot friend's memory. "Can I hang out with you?" She tried to keep her voice steady. *New Jenny does not squeak when inviting herself to hang out with hot boarding school boys!* she silently scolded herself, digging her nails into her palms.

"Sure," the guy answered, staring directly at her chest.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" Jenny looked around. "Does everyone have to hang out in the lobby before they get assigned rooms?"

"Nah, we're just screwups, so we're stuck here until they tell us where we can go." He grinned, whipping a BlackBerry out of his khaki pants pocket.

Jenny sat down. "What did you do wrong?"

"Don't listen to Heath." Brandon shook his head. "The Waverly teachers are just assholes."

Jenny started discreetly wiping the mud off her pink shoes as best she could. "So I'm a little freaked out. Something totally attacked me on my way over here. It was like . . . a giant flying cat."

"Ohhh . . . That's a great horned owl," Brandon explained. "They're all over the campus. Someone donated a pair of them

like a hundred years ago and they spawned. But even though they practically kill kids all the time, the horned owl is our mascot. I guess it's, like, Waverly tradition to have them around."

"They crap all over the place," Heath added.

"Oh, I like traditions," Jenny exclaimed quickly. "But the thing swooped for me like it didn't want to miss!"

"How *could* it miss?" Heath muttered, typing on his BlackBerry. He looked straight at Jenny's boobs again. Old Jenny would have been embarrassed, she thought, but not New Jenny. She would call him out.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked politely, folding her hands in her lap.

Heath smiled wryly, then cocked his head. "Wait a sec." He stopped. "You said you were from the city? As in, New York?"

"Yes. The Upper West Side."

Heath's eyes lit up like a slot machine. "Have you heard of a club called Hen Party?"

Jenny furrowed her eyebrows. "No . . ."

"Maybe I'll take you some time."

"Inappropriate," Brandon muttered. Hen Party was some strip club in Manhattan everyone was suddenly talking about. He looked from Heath to the new girl. They seemed to be in some sort of force-field staring contest with each other. She looked smitten, but whatever. Heath might be Brandon's friend, but he was the human version of a Monet—he only looked good from afar. Close up, once you got to know him, he was pretty . . . well, ridiculous. *Just wait until you find out that he*

has a bad toenail-clipping habit, Brandon thought, gritting his teeth. *Just wait until you find out he gossips more than a girl. Just wait until you find out the girls call him Pony behind his back, because everybody has taken a ride.*

The staring contest continued. Then a little high-pitched noise rang out, and Heath's attention quickly swerved back to his BlackBerry. Pop! Force field deactivated.

"Mister Jennifer Humphrey," he muttered again, "from the Upper West Side." He tapped out a few more lines and threw his BlackBerry back into his bag. Then he stripped off his T-shirt and rubbed his golden-brown, summer-spent-in-Nantucket chiseled torso. "I'm going to take a shower. Wanna come?"

Jenny opened her mouth to respond, but Heath wheeled around, found a fluffy white bath towel in his duffel bag, and sauntered off to the bathroom.

Brandon sighed and pulled out his silver Motorola Razr. He scrolled through a few e-mails—just some more welcome-back messages and speculative gossip about what had happened to Tinsley Carmichael. He could sense Jenny watching him and couldn't help but get all tingly

"Are we allowed phones?" Jenny asked.

"Well, no. We can't talk on them. But everyone texts and IMs on their phones. You just log on to OwlNet and use your Waverly e-mail address, which is just your first and last name, no spaces. It's a loophole the faculty hasn't figured out yet."

"Shoot. I didn't bring mine. The manual said no cell phones."

“Waverly Owls must not use cell phones on campus,” Brandon recited in a mock-serious voice.

Jenny giggled. “Yeah. I love all the Waverly Owls stuff.”

Brandon smiled. “Apparently one of the old Waverly headmasters wrote the manual right after the Roaring Twenties, maybe during, like, Prohibition or something, when manners and good behavior were really important. I guess owls were the mascots back then, too. It’s been adapted for modern times, with cell phones and stuff.”

“Funny.” Jenny felt herself relax a little. Her cheeks hurt from smiling so much already today.

“So there’s a party in this lounge tonight. Maybe you wanna come?”

“A party?” Jenny raised her eyebrows eagerly. “Sure.”

“I mean, it’ll be pretty casual, but it’s tradition, you know?” Brandon shrugged. He seemed less shy without Heath around.

Jenny bit her lip, which Brandon found irresistible. She was so fresh-faced and seemed so excited to be there, different from all the cookie-cutter, Fair Isle sweater, Gucci sunglasses, Barbie-goes-to-boarding-school Waverly girls who took it all for granted. Now if only she could stay off the Pony ride before classes even got started. . . .

“Well,” Jenny interrupted his interior monologue. “If it’s a tradition, then I’ll have to come. Heath will be there too?”

Heath slunk through the lounge doorway. His shaggy blond hair was dripping water down his bare chest, and the white bath-towel was tied right under his chiseled hipbones. He wasn’t holding anything except for his BlackBerry, and he smiled at it as he spoke. “I wouldn’t miss it.”



HeathFerro: I already met stripper girl. Twice.

RyanReynolds: ???

HeathFerro: Dad gave her a ride to the front office. Then me and Brandon were sitting in Richards and she came in. She plays it cool, though. Real innocent. But you can tell she's naughty.

RyanReynolds: She snuck into a boys' dorm already? Did she show you her thong?

HeathFerro: Not yet . . .



EVEN WHEN PROVOKED, A WAVERLY OWL
SHOULD REMAIN CIVIL TO HER ROOMMATE.

“**M**om, can you please tell Raoul that he doesn’t have to come into the dorm with me? This is *embarrassing*.” Brett Messerschmidt tried to balance a cream-colored Chanel quilted purse and a black Jack Spade laptop bag in one hand and a giant Hermès shopping bag in the other while cradling her platinum Nokia against her shoulder. Her parents’ personal assistant, Raoul, who was two hundred sixty pounds and bald, struggled to lift some of her seemingly endless luggage without ripping his black suit. Finally he gave up and took off his jacket, revealing a perspiration-stained white shirt and a mountain of muscles.

“Honey, you need his help,” her mother cooed in her thick New Jersey accent on the other end of the line. “You can’t carry those heavy suitcases all by yourself!”

Brett groaned and slammed her phone shut. Everyone else carried their own stuff—no matter how loaded they were. Drivers just left their bags on the curb in front of the dorm. It wasn't as if anybody was going to walk off with your shit. But her parents, Stuart and Becki Messerschmidt of Rumson, New Jersey, babied her as though she were one of their shivering Teacup Chihuahuas.

Her parents—*shudder*. Her father, the most prominent plastic surgeon in the tri-state area, was known for bragging about the highest percentage of fat he could lipo out of a patient in a single sitting. And the only time Brett's mom had accompanied her to Waverly, when Brett was an eighth grader and touring the school, Mrs. Messerschmidt had told a particularly WASPY-looking mother that her chin was just *perfect* and had asked who she used. The woman had stared at Mrs. Messerschmidt blankly before finally getting it and storming away.

Ever since she'd started Waverly, Brett had straight-up lied about her parents. She claimed they lived on an East Hampton organic farm but summered in Newfoundland, that her father was a cardiologist and her mom threw small-scale Canadian charity events. She had no idea why that was the story she'd come up with, but anything was better than the real story, which was that her parents were nouveau riche and the tackiest people Brett had ever met. Everyone at Waverly bought it, except for Tinsley, who last year had answered Brett's cell phone when she wasn't in the room and had a lengthy conversation about leopard versus tiger prints with Mrs. Messerschmidt, who was of course calling from her Rumson, New Jersey—not East Hampton—home. That was

one good thing about Tinsley not coming back: at least her embarrassing parents would remain a secret.

“You really don’t have to help me, after driving all this way.” Brett smiled apologetically at Raoul. She’d have to remember to send him some Kiehl’s All-Sport Muscle Rub for when he got home.

“It’s fine,” Raoul replied in his baritone voice, but Brett thought she detected a slight groan when he dropped her bags and headed back to get the next round from the car.

When she unlocked her dorm room door, her best friend, Callie, who had a perfect, *untacky* pedigree—her mother was Scarlett O’Hara incarnate and the governor of Georgia, for God’s sake—smirked as Raoul fussed over exactly where Brett’s oversized Louis Vuitton sweater trunk would go.

“Oh, wherever’s fine!” Brett said quickly. Then she turned back to Callie. “Hey.”

“Hey, yourself.” Callie leaned against the window and crossed her arms.

She looked like she’d spent the whole summer getting twisted and prodded by her Pilates instructor, Claude, and eating nothing but Trident gum. Her hair was shoved into a messy low ponytail, and she had that slightly dazed, you’d-think-she-was-ditzy-if-you-didn’t-know-better look in her hazel eyes. A pale orange cotton skirt and top lay in a rumpled pile on the floor, and now she was wearing a faded baby-blue T-shirt, mini Ralph Lauren terry-cloth boy shorts, and gymnastics socks with little pink fuzzy balls at the heels.

Where Callie was cute and pretty in a preppy way—she

was captain of the girls' field hockey team, after all—Brett was more unusual-looking. She had pale, milky-white skin and very red bob-length hair. Her green eyes were almond-shaped and both her nose and chin came to mischievous-looking points.

It was weird suddenly seeing Callie and comparing herself to her again. Last year, Brett, Callie, and Tinsley had been three peas in a pod. But then the E thing had happened and everything had changed. No one knew why Tinsley was the only one who'd been kicked out, but Callie had always had a particular talent for persuasion—freshman year, she'd convinced Sarah Mortimer to go out with Baylor Kenyon instead of Brandon Buchanan, all because Callie had wanted Brandon for herself. And last year, Benny Cunningham, their well-bred, beautiful brunette friend from Philadelphia, had wanted to go out with Erik Olssen, a pale, hot Swedish import, but he'd liked skanky Tricia Rieken—who'd had a boob job and wore the sluttiest, most dominatrixlike clothes from Dolce & Gabbana. Somehow Callie had managed to persuade Tricia to like Lon Baruzza, who was on scholarship but gorgeous and allegedly very good at sex, leaving Erik open for Benny.

Clearly Callie was good at getting people to do whatever she wanted, especially when she had something to gain personally. And in this case, maybe Callie was better off without Tinsley around: last spring, Tinsley and Callie's boyfriend, Easy Walsh, had been spotted by the girls' soccer team behind the row houses at night—alone. Both Tinsley and Easy had denied that anything had happened, but Callie could get pretty territorial

when it came to boyfriends. It seemed crazy that Callie would get Tinsley kicked out of school for possibly hooking up with Easy, but, well, Callie was a little insane.

Callie squinted. "Did your hair get redder?"

"Kind of," Brett mumbled. Her colorist, Jacques, had fucked up and used a blue red on her instead of a yellow red. She'd gone to Bergdorf's to get it fixed but had managed to get the salon's most punk rock stylist, who had told her it was perfect and that it would go against his artistic sensibilities to change it. Brett worried that she looked too much like Kate Winslet in that *Eternal Sunshine* movie, which was *not* a good look.

"I like it," Callie declared. "It looks awesome."

Liar! Brett knew what Callie thought of fake-looking dyed hair. Brett slammed her bag down on the floor. "So what, you don't call me all summer?"

"I . . . I called you," Callie stammered, widening her eyes.

"No, you didn't. You sent me one text message. In June."

Callie stood up. "Well, you didn't respond!"

"I . . ." Brett trailed off. Callie was right. She hadn't responded. "So, did you hear from Tinsley?"

"Of course."

Brett felt a stab of jealousy. "Me too," she lied. She hadn't heard from her glamorous best friend since she'd been expelled last May.

They both stared at Tinsley's bare bed. Would it be empty all year? Maybe they'd use it for extra storage or cover it with an Indian batik bedspread and embroidered pillows from one of the hippie Rhinecliff stores. Or would Waverly stick them with some weirdo no one wanted to room with?

"Tinsley called me a whole bunch of times," Callie continued, a little aggressively.

"Me too," Brett lied again, removing some of her blouses from her cream-colored leather suitcase. "So, how's Easy?" She changed the subject. "Did you see him this summer?"

"Um . . . yeah," Callie replied quietly, a twinge of hurt in her voice. "Did you see Jeremiah?"

"Yeah, some," Brett mumbled back.

"Still hate the way he says *car*?" Callie asked as she examined her clear lip gloss in a tiny black lacquered Chanel compact.

"Yes," Brett groaned. Her boyfriend, Jeremiah, was the star lineman for St. Lucius and even though he was from an old-money family in Newton, a well-to-do suburb of Boston, he spoke with a Boston townie accent, omitting his *r*'s like Matt Damon in *Good Will Hunting*.

"Did you visit him or did he visit you?"

"Well, I spent a week with his family on Martha's Vineyard. That was really nice." Brett liked Jeremiah, but she really loved his family. They were textbook New England wealthy—so understated and tasteful and the exact opposite of her trashy parents. It didn't hurt either that Jeremiah was gorgeous, with an angular, square jaw, floppy reddish-brown hair to his shoulders, and blue-green eyes that drank her in.

Brett had promised that, as soon as she got to school, she'd call him up and they'd have phone sex. Jeremiah had wanted to have sex over the summer, but she just wasn't ready. She wasn't entirely sure why, except that she'd never had sex with anybody before, and she really wasn't sure if Jeremiah was the right person to do it with first.

Of course, indecision about losing her virginity wasn't the kind of thing a girl like Brett ever admitted out loud. She'd told Callie she'd lost it ages ago to a Swiss boy named Gunther she'd met on a family skiing trip to Gstaad, even though really she'd hardly even let him feel her up. Brett had cultivated an image at Waverly: tough, experienced, sophisticated, and a little bitchy. Her mom was the opposite—helpless, naive, childish—and Brett didn't want to be like that.

Callie extended her long, perfectly smooth legs. "I really need a shower." She yawned, stood up, and slipped on a pair of rubbery clogs. "You want to go to dinner when I get back?"

Brett shrugged. "I don't know. I have to look over some perfect stuff for tomorrow. There's some new adviser, so I need to be prepared and stuff." Brett had been elected junior prefect last year, which meant she would lead roll call and act as junior leader of DC, or Disciplinary Committee. It was a huge popularity nod—everyone in your class had to vote you into the position. "But I guess I could skip it. And we have the party tonight, too. . . ."

"Whatever." Callie waved her towel and turned for the door.

Brett flopped onto her bed and stared out the window. The view of the river, which usually calmed her down like a shot of aged whiskey, now seemed suffocating. She'd imagined her first meeting with Callie after the long summer would be different. She hadn't expected them to talk about Tinsley right away, and she'd assumed Callie would behave like she used to—throwing herself on Brett's bed, opening a bag of Pirate's Booty for them to share, and gossiping about all the wild, romantic, risqué stuff

they'd done all summer. They'd laugh, have some gin and tonics, and go to dinner, just like last year.

She flipped open her cell phone and quickly hit the shortcut key to call her sister, Brianna, who lived in New York and worked as a fashion editor at *Elle* magazine. Bree had been through the Waverly mill six years before and could usually talk Brett out of any funk. Unfortunately, Bree's phone went straight to voice mail.

"Hey, it's me," Brett rambled when she heard the beep. "I feel . . . I don't know. A mess. Call me or something."

She hung up and flopped back on the bed. As soon as she did, her cell phone bleated in her bag. Thinking it was Bree, she opened it up, but she was wrong.

"Hello, Jeremiah," she sighed, pressing the phone to her ear. "How are you?"

"Wicked awesome, now," he breathed on the other end.

Brett rolled her eyes. Then she pictured him spread-eagled on his St. Lucius bed, ten miles away, in a tattered varsity football jersey and boxer shorts, with his long tan arms and sexy eyes, and she felt a warm whoosh of pleasure.

"So are we going to do this . . . thing?" she asked, not even bothering to shut the dorm room door. Let the nosy sophomore girls next door get an earful. Maybe they'd learn something.



HeathFerro: I got news. Talked to my older brother's friend who works in I-banking, and he says that this place Fish Stick is the bomb in the city. Girls take it off for 99 cents!

CallieVernon: Um, Heath? I think you got the wrong text addy. This is Callie. I don't want to hear about strippers. Especially not as I'm about to take a shower.

HeathFerro: You're in the shower? Can I see? Now that you and Easy are broken up, you're a free bird, right?

CallieVernon: What? Who told you that?

CallieVernon: Heath? Where are you? It's not true!

CallieVernon: Hello??



BennyCunningham: So the big question going around is, you take a ride on the pony yet?

CallieVernon: Pony?

BennyCunningham: It's the new name for Heath Ferro. He gets more ass than a pony at a country fair.

CallieVernon: Ew. No way have I hooked up with him. He's nasty. Have YOU?

BennyCunningham: Guilty as charged.

CallieVernon: OMG. When?

BennyCunningham: Freshman year. We made out in the Stansfield Hall coatroom. Never again. Totally gross.

CallieVernon: Not to change the subject, but has anyone told you Easy and I broke up?

BennyCunningham: Umm . . . maybe.

CallieVernon: Who?

BennyCunningham: Can't remember. Gotta go to predinner prep!

CallieVernon: Because it's not true.

CallieVernon: Seriously.

CallieVernon: U still there?



IF IT WILL IMPRESS HER ROOMMATES,
A WAVERLY OWL MAY DISH HER OWN DIRT.

“I’m looking for Jennifer Humphrey.” A thin, birdlike girl with a British accent and stringy blond hair stood twitching in front of Brandon and Jenny, just inside the door to Richards’ lounge. She wore a plain white sleeveless cotton turtle-neck with a little triangular crest over the pocket and very suburban–mom–looking khakis, the kind that cinch around your waist and make your ass look huge. “I guess that would be you.”

“Yes,” Jenny half-squeaked, trying to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

“I’m Yvonne Stidder.” The girl stuck her hand out. She had a flimsy handshake and acne on her chin. “I’m a mentor to new students. We found you a room.”

Brandon raised his eyebrows at Jenny and started to get up. “It was nice meeting you, Jenny.”

"You too." Jenny hefted her pink L.L. Bean duffels onto her shoulder. "I'll see you tonight," she whispered when Yvonne had turned her back.

"I'm so sorry we kept you waiting for so long," Yvonne continued, leading Jenny down the Richards stairwell, past an entryway full of already-moved-in Trek mountain bikes, skateboards, empty PlayStation boxes, and about a dozen well-used soccer balls.

"No big deal." Jenny was thrilled to have hung out with those two cool boys, but she was kind of relieved to be away from them, so she could breathe a little.

"Normally we aren't allowed in the boys' dorms except during visitation hours." Yvonne gave Jenny a sidelong glance, holding the door open for her. She sneezed as soon as they stepped outside. "Actually, um, that was the first time I've ever been in a boys' dorm. Although of course I know everything about the boys' dorms. I know all sorts of facts about Waverly if you want to ask me any questions. Anything at all."

"Okay. Thanks." If Yvonne hadn't seemed like such a dork, Jenny might've suspected she was coked up, she talked so fast. "So what dorm am I in?" she asked as they crossed the green. She felt a nervous flutter in her chest. They were going to her new dorm, where she'd live for the whole school year! Where all sorts of amazing things would happen to her! Hopefully.

"Dumbarton. Over there, see?" Yvonne pointed to a two-story brick building with cutout windows sticking out of the roof at the back of the campus. Beyond it shimmered the

Hudson, which looked a lot prettier up here than it did in the city. Jenny could just picture the boys' crew team gliding effortlessly across its surface in their sleek sculls, their strong arms bulging as they rowed. "This girl Tinsley Carmichael—she was going to live with Callie Vernon and Brett Messerschmidt, but then she got kicked out, so there's a free spot. My friend from jazz ensemble, Storm Bathurst, lives next door—"

"Wait. Did you say Tinsley?" Jenny asked. She recognized that name, but she'd absorbed so much in so little time that she couldn't remember when or where. "Why'd she get kicked out?"

Yvonne shoved her round, wire-rimmed glasses further up her nose. She smelled like Vicks VapoRub. "I'm not sure," she replied flatly. "I don't like to gossip."

"Well, can you tell me *anything* about my new roommates?"

Yvonne paused. "I don't know them well. But they're the girls everyone flocks around."

"Flocks around?" Jenny's heart sped up.

"You know, the ones always giving parties, always with the cutest boys . . ." Yvonne giggled and turned to Jenny. "Not to say there aren't cute boys in the jazz ensemble. Do you play any instruments? The jazz ensemble is looking for some people."

"Um, no, sorry. But about Callie and Brett—they're, like, really popular?"

"Yeah." Yvonne nodded, sidestepping a maroon pinnie that someone had left on the field. "There's this little crowd of kids that everyone on campus watches."

Oh, really? Jenny thought excitedly. She touched the preppy little alligator on her shirt, pleased that she'd dressed so nicely

to meet her supercool new roomies. Then she noticed a tall, brunette boy with matted hair, as if he'd just taken off a hat, walking across the green. He carried a big wooden easel over his shoulder, and his jeans were spattered with paint. Jenny's breath caught in her throat.

"Who is that?" She pointed.

"Him?" Yvonne muttered. "That's Easy Walsh."

"Easy. What a great name," Jenny mused. "Is he an artist or something?"

"I don't know him very well, except that he's always getting into trouble." Yvonne crinkled her nose. "Smoking," she whispered. For a girl who didn't like to gossip, she certainly knew a lot.

The boy entered the double doors of the library. Jenny suddenly wished she could ditch her bags—and Yvonne—and follow him.

Instead, she followed Yvonne into the Dumbarton dorm. It was a quaint, two-story brick building that had its name inscribed in brownstone above a large, white, wooden farmhouse door. They ducked through a narrow passage and up a set of granite stairs. One of the steps was inscribed 1832, RHINECLIFF, NY. The dorm was even older than Jenny's family's crumbling rent-stabilized apartment building on the Upper West Side.

All around her, girls were moving their things in. Rooney blared out of one room, No Doubt out of another. She saw a short Asian girl with pigtails unrolling a giant poster of Jennifer Garner as Elektra, kicking someone's ass.

They approached door 303, which was slightly ajar.

“. . . and I'm licking you all over, and—wait. No. Jesus, Jeremiah, you don't have your pants off yet. Stay with me here!”

“Uh, hello?” Yvonne said, pushing the door open a little.

A striking-looking older girl with blazing red hair sprang up from one of the room's twin beds. “I have to go,” she blurted into her phone and flipped it shut. She glanced for a second at Yvonne and then fixed her piercing eyes on Jenny.

“Erm, this is Jenny Humphrey,” Yvonne explained. “She's your new roommate. She's from . . . where was it?”

“Constance Billard,” Jenny answered, sticking out her hand. “In New York City.”

“Oh. Cool. Brett Messerschmidt.” The girl wore a starched, short-sleeved tailored white blouse that Jenny had seen in the windows of the Soho Scoop store all summer and those knee-length pegged shorts only the hippest kids in Williamsburg were wearing.

Jenny walked into the room, which was bigger and somehow plainer than she'd imagined. The windows were huge and beautiful, overlooking the river, while the beds and furniture were just . . . old. She studied her new roommate out of the corner of her eye. Her blazing red hair was cut in a severe bob that ended right at her chin. One ear had about seven tiny gold hoop earrings, and she wore a gold diamond Cartier tank watch on her left wrist. She was sexy and sophisticated, and very . . . familiar. Then Jenny remembered: there was a picture of Brett on Waverly's Web site. She was the Girl Hovering Over Her Books Looking Studious. Or at least that's what Jenny had called her.

“What about Callie?” Yvonne looked around the room. “Is she here yet?”

“Shower,” Brett muttered.

Yvonne blinked furiously, then mumbled something about a flute lesson and fled the room.

Jenny walked over to what looked like the spare bed and sat down, bouncing a couple of times. “This is a great room. I love the view.”

“Yeah, it’s okay.” Brett folded her arms across her chest.

“Who are *you*?” came a loud voice behind them. Jenny turned and saw a tall, strikingly beautiful girl with enormous hazel eyes and dark blond hair that looked like it had just been blow-dried. Jenny thought she looked just like the Disney movie version of Cinderella. Once she had transformed into a princess, of course.

“Hey. I’m Jenny. I’m—they assigned me to this room.”

“They? Who’s ‘they’?” Cinderella demanded.

“Well . . . Waverly,” Jenny stammered. “Are you Callie?”

“Yes. Are you a junior or a sophomore?”

“Sophomore. What are you guys?”

“Juniors.” Callie pursed her pink-lipsticked lips and deposited an enormous Gucci makeup bag on top of her desk. “You’re taking that bed?” She pointed to the bed Jenny was sitting on.

“I guess so. I mean, unless it’s not okay with you two.”

“I suppose it’s fine.” Callie glanced at Brett. “I guess Tinsley’s really gone then.”

Brett made a snorting noise through her nose. Jenny just stood there, not sure what to say.

“What happened to . . . er . . . Tinsley?” she finally asked.

“It’s complicated,” Brett responded quickly, unzipping a

suitcase entirely full of shoes. Jenny checked the labels on a few. Jimmy Choo. Sigerson Morrison. Manolo Blahnik.

"It was nothing," Callie added. She stared out the window, away from both of them.

Jenny wasn't much of a smoker, but she wished she could have a cigarette right then, just to have something to do with her hands.

Callie finally broke the silence. "Where'd you go to school before this?"

"Constance Billard? It's in—"

"New York City. All girls," Callie interrupted in a breathy voice, sliding a little closer to Jenny in the same way a cat might rub up against your calf. She turned to Brett. "Didn't Tinsley go to Constance?"

"No. She went to Trinity. Until fifth grade. Then she went somewhere in Switzerland, then here."

"Yeah, Tinsley definitely didn't go to an all-girls' school, now that I think about it." Callie examined her cuticles. "I remember her saying that she had tons of boyfriends."

"Well, Tinsley's beautiful," Brett added offhandedly, taking T-shirts out of another suitcase.

Jenny bristled. Was Brett saying that she wasn't beautiful? Who was this Tinsley girl, anyway?

"She could get any guy she wanted," Brett continued. "Even guys with girlfriends."

"That's not true," Callie snapped, before turning back to Jenny.

Jenny's eyes darted back and forth between her roommates. What was up with them?

“Tinsley had her eleventh birthday party at Chelsea Piers. Like, she rented out the whole thing and installed a trapeze school in the gym area. Did you go to that?”

Jenny shrugged. “Sorry, no.” But she remembered that party, all right. Back when she was ten, Jenny’s father had ranted for days about an article in the *New York Times* Style section covering a party at the Chelsea Piers Sports Complex for a girl a year older than Jenny. Her dad had mocked it for being indulgent and piggishly bourgeois, but Jenny had thought the girl was the luckiest kid on the planet. And now she’d be sleeping in her bed! This *had* to be a good sign.

Callie looked at Jenny like a Christie’s appraiser might examine a Ming vase and then smiled. “Well, welcome to Waverly. I think you’re going to like it here.”

Jenny hugged herself. *I like it already.*



OwlNet

Instant Message Inbox

TeagueWilliams: What did you say the 99-cent girl looks like?

HeathFerro: Brown curly hair, practically a midget, major knockers.

TeagueWilliams: So lemme guess. . . . You taking her to the chapel?

HeathFerro: Hells yeah!



OwlNet

Instant Message Inbox

CelineColista: So Callie and Brett are pissed at each other. They're both going to Marymount's office to get a room transfer.

BennyCunningham: All 'cause of Tinsley, huh? Where is she, anyway? Does anyone even know?

CelineColista: I heard she's dating some guy from the Raves and they're on tour in Europe.

BennyCunningham: I thought that new girl from the city was dating the Raves. . . .

CelineColista: Which one!?

BennyCunningham: All of them. The whole band.

CelineColista: Gross. Where'd you hear that?

BennyCunningham: I have my sources.



CHAPEL IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE PLACE
FOR YOUNG OWLS TO SOCIALIZE.

“Well, look who’s here!”

Jenny stood outside Richards’ lounge, reapplying her translucent pink lip gloss in the large, smoky, café-style hall mirror. She was wearing a scoop-neck, emerald-green APC top that was getting a teensy bit stretched out by her cumbersome breasts, and the highest tan leather heels she owned. She whipped her head around to find Heath Ferro, the boy from earlier with the BlackBerry and the great abs, standing in the doorway, an unlit cigarette in his hand. Tiny beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and his eyes had a glassy, tipsy look.

“Hey,” she answered brightly, wiping her hands off on the only pair of Seven jeans she owned, which happened to make her legs look slightly longer than tree-stump length. “Is the party in there?”

“Indeed it is,” Heath replied gallantly. He looped his arm around Jenny’s waist.

Jenny smiled. Heath seemed really happy to see her. And she was happy to see him, too. He wore a light blue untucked oxford shirt, army fatigue shorts, and no shoes. She liked his broad shoulders and floppy, I’m-a-prep-school-boy-through-and-through haircut. *Sort of the way Hamlet would look if he were a real person*, Jenny thought. All that princely Danish breeding, plus a flicker of wildness in his eye.

And Jenny liked wildness.

Heath pushed the heavy wooden lounge door open for her. Everyone froze. “It’s cool,” Heath announced, his hand brushing accidentally against Jenny’s boob. “It’s just us.”

Jenny glanced around the room. Her first Waverly party! She could have been stuck back in the dorm playing checkers with Yvonne, but instead she was breaking the rules on her very first night at boarding school! She could immediately tell that it had a different feel than the parties she’d gone to back in New York—no one was fooling around in the guest bedroom and they didn’t have to worry about parents arriving back early from Paris. Someone had dimmed the lights and lit a bunch of candles. Everyone looked like they’d just stepped out of a J.Crew catalog—they were all so *pretty*, with perfect, glowing skin and healthy, athletic bodies that came from mandatory year-round sports. Each person was more beautiful than the last. Everyone was holding large insulated coffee mugs, which was a little puzzling, until Jenny realized that the mugs contained alcohol.

Across the room, Brett sat on the scratched leather couch with Callie, their friend Benny Cunningham, and Sage Francis, who had been regaling them with tales of the fabulous African safari she'd gone on this summer. It didn't sound so great to Brett. Flies, malaria, and smelly wild animals. *Fun!* She gazed toward the doorway, saw her new roommate waltz in on Heath Ferro's arm, and immediately elbowed Benny hard in the ribs.

Benny was from Main Line Philadelphia, stood to inherit \$200 million, and was pretty in a horsey way: tall and lithe, with long, thick brown hair and enormous brown eyes. She was a prude and always blamed it on where she grew up, as if Philly were a different planet where the girls drank whole milk and saved themselves for marriage. Benny always quoted a Diane Keaton line from an old Woody Allen movie, *Manhattan*: "I'm from Philadelphia, and we don't do things like that *there*." She didn't quite realize that the line was meant to be a joke. Despite her prudishness, she was also a major gossip who read *Page Six* religiously but acted like she knew it all first-hand.

"Looks like Heath's gone in for the kill," Benny's best friend, Sage Francis, laughed, pointing. "Guess he knew where he could get some."

Brett shrugged. She couldn't imagine her naïve new roommate being a slut, but there *was* something seemingly sparkly and fresh about Jenny that might make her irresistible to, say, an entire indie rock band, which was the rumor going around campus. And she did have some kind of air of mystery about her, which reminded Brett of someone. Tinsley, perhaps?

"So are you guys really applying for room transfers?" Sage whispered, touching Brett on her bare shoulder.

“Room transfers?”

Sage fluttered her heavily glittered eyelids. She always over-used eye glitter, because a hot French guy she’d met in St. Barts during spring break the year before had told her that it made her eyes look huge and sexy. “I thought you and Callie were ready to scratch each other’s eyes out.”

“Well . . .” Brett trailed off. “I wasn’t planning on transferring. . . .” She looked at her roommate. Callie was across the room talking intensely to Celine Colista, the other field hockey captain. They’d all played field hockey together since arriving at Waverly freshman year, but Brett had never taken it as seriously as the rest of the girls. Would Callie really transfer rooms behind Brett’s back? Had it come to that? She turned back to her new roommate, who was standing in the doorway and gazing starry-eyed, as if she’d never been to a party before in her life.

Jenny was kind of overwhelmed—but in a good way. Heath returned, weaving a strong-smelling Waverly travel mug in front of her face. “For you.”

“What’s in it?” she asked, taking the mug with both hands.

“Does it matter?” He grinned and clumsily tipped the contents of his own mug down his throat.

Jenny put the mug to her lips. The strong, sour liquid tasted like beer mixed with rum. It gurgled down her windpipe, bringing tears to her eyes.

“Hey, there’s Brandon!” she managed to gasp. Brandon stood by one of the giant windows, surrounded by three tiny girls with matching white-blond ponytails. When he saw

Jenny across the room, his face brightened and he waved. She raised her hand to wave back, but Heath grabbed it and pulled her to his side.

“It’s time for the new girl to do our little initiation ritual,” he said, smiling devilishly.

“What?” Jenny frowned. “I haven’t heard of any initiation rituals.”

“Then you haven’t been talking to the right people.” Heath took another long drink from his mug, then set it on the ancient silver radiator. “Come with me.” He led her to the door.

On the way out, a couple of guys gave him high fives. “Where you goin’, Pony?” one of them asked. Heath just raised his eyebrows. The guys started laughing and making whooping, whinnying noises.

“What’s that all about?” Jenny asked, glancing back at the hooting boys.

“Who the hell knows?” Heath muttered, as he opened the heavy wooden door for Jenny.

“Who’s Pony? You?”

“Shhh,” Heath interrupted. Jenny pursed her lips together, feeling a little uneasy. But this was boarding school. Magical Waverly land. She was safe here, wasn’t she?

Outside, the night was pitch-black and dead quiet except for the sounds of some crickets left over from summer. Heath stopped in front of the Waverly chapel, the building next to Richards. The chapel was squat yet stately, with stained glass windows and a heavy oak door.

“What are we—?” Jenny started. She hadn’t been inside the

chapel yet—she would be tomorrow morning, for roll call, announcements, and prayers.

Heath stubbed his cigarette out against one of the front windowpanes. “It’s a tradition for new Waverly students to go into the chapel before school actually starts.”

“You’re not going to lock me in or anything, are you?” Jenny asked in a wavering voice, not caring how Old Jenny she sounded.

“Course not.” Heath raised his eyebrows. “I’m coming in with you.”

“Oh.” Jenny’s heart was picking up speed. “Okay, then.”

Heath pulled on the enormous oak door until it opened. The chapel’s inside was lit only with a few candles. And it was as quiet as . . . well . . . a church.

“It’s really nice in here,” Jenny whispered.

“Sit over here with me.” Heath patted a space on one of the dark wooden benches. In the candlelight, with his hands curled neatly in his lap and his hair slicked back, Jenny wondered if she’d misjudged Heath. Maybe he was actually really spiritual and sensitive.

She slid into the pew next to him. “So this is the ritual, huh?”

“Ritual?” Heath looked at her cluelessly.

“You said that—” Jenny stopped. Of *course* there wasn’t a ritual. It was a trick.

They were silent for a minute, listening to the wind pressing up against the sides of the chapel. Then Heath placed his hand over hers.

"You were so beautiful this morning," he whispered breathily, mixing up the b and m, so that he said *mootiful* and *borning*. "Especially when my dad gave you a ride up the hill."

"Oh," Jenny answered, beaming. He *did* remember! "Well, thanks."

"You're from that all-girls school in New York, aren't you?"

"Yeah." Had she said that this morning? She didn't think so.

"Did you get kicked out?"

"Not exactly."

Then Heath lurched toward her. She thought he'd just lost his balance, but his mouth was suddenly all over her face, and his tongue was poking through her lips. Jenny's first reaction was to push him away, but tingles of pleasure began to run up her spine. Heath was an amazing kisser, maybe better than anyone else she'd ever kissed. She touched the nape of his neck, squeezed her eyes shut, and allowed herself to be swept away. The wooden bench made tiny aching creaks and groans. Their slurpy kissing noises rang against the alcove ceilings. His hand traced the outlines of her fingers but then quickly moved down her wrist to her forearm and finally up to her chest.

Jenny slid away from him, alarmed.

"Whatsa matter?" Heath smirked, his eyes flickering back and forth from one of her breasts to the other. He didn't look like a spiritual little angel anymore.

"Well . . . this is a little fast," Jenny managed. "That's all."

"Come on," Heath urged, his voice getting sleepier. "Jenny from New York. Crazy Jenny."

"I'm not all that crazy," Jenny contradicted. She had a creepy

feeling that Heath was quoting someone. What had people been saying about her? And where had they gotten their information?

Then suddenly Heath tipped over, laid his head on the bench, and began to quietly snore. Jenny stood up. Heath was wasted. She looked around the empty chapel, his snores echoing off the beamed ceilings.

All this made her feel very Old Jenny. She sighed and looked around at the dimly lit chapel. School didn't officially start until tomorrow, she resolved. New Jenny was just getting warmed up.