



**A WAVERLY OWL DOES NOT DISAPPOINT
HER ADMIRERS.**

Jenny Humphrey leaned against a dark oak window frame in Dumbarton 303 on the Tuesday evening after Thanksgiving break. She stared out at the Waverly campus, blanketed in snow and bathed in the yellowy orange glow of the gaslit lamps that lined the walkways. Clumps of students bundled in cashmere scarves and long wool coats trundled across the quad to the dining hall, occasionally pausing to pack a few snowballs. A lone figure was rolling a snowman out in the middle of the smooth, white lawn.

‘Are you guys ready for dinner yet?’ Jenny asked over her shoulder. Her stomach rumbled, reminding her that she’d skipped lunch to finish her paper on *The Portrait of a Lady* and was now completely famished.

Unfortunately, her roommate, Callie Vernon, was still in

the process of unpacking the overstuffed Louis Vuitton suitcase that had been flung across their spare bed since she'd returned from her shopping-filled Thanksgiving break in Atlanta. The process was taking twice as long as it should have, since Callie insisted upon holding up each new garment for the admiration of Jenny and Tinsley Carmichael.

'... and this is from this tiny boutique in downtown Atlanta.' Callie waved a flimsy red Milly silk tank dress with the tags still on it in front of Tinsley's half-closed eyes, ignoring Jenny's dinner plea.

Tinsley lay on her back on Callie's unmade bed, her dark, almost black hair tumbling off the edge. She raised her violet-colored eyes from the well-thumbed copy of *Italian Vogue* she was flipping through. 'A little racy for the governor's taste.'

Callie tossed her wavy strawberry blond hair over her shoulder and grabbed a hanger from her closet. 'She felt so terrible about the whole *Maine incident* that she didn't say no to anything.'

Jenny giggled and drew a small heart in the condensation that covered the windowpane. Callie's mother, the governor of Georgia, had been under the mistaken impression that Callie had some sort of drug problem, and the month before had sent her off to a boot-camp rehab facility in the middle of nowhere, where she'd almost frozen to death in the snow. Until, that is, her boyfriend, Easy Walsh, came to rescue her – and then subsequently got expelled by Dean Marymount for leaving campus and violating his probation.

It was still shocking to Jenny that Callie had broken up with Easy over Thanksgiving break. This was after he'd managed to escape from the West Virginia military school where his father had sent him post-expulsion, and waited for her atop the Empire State Building. It was so romantic, and with such a sad ending, that it broke Jenny's heart. She knew it was painful for Callie, who, despite exuding an aura of self-assured sophistication, had an almost childlike need for constant affection from her boyfriend. Easy's banishment to military school, where he wasn't allowed phone calls or e-mail, had been too much for Callie. Even though it had only been a few weeks, Callie couldn't handle the long distance, the lack of communication, the uncertainty.

Jenny's stomach let out a giant gurgle. She pressed her hands to her belly, pretending to straighten her black cotton Gap turtleneck. Next to Callie and Tinsley in their expensive designer clothes, it was hard not to feel like a reject from the Filene's Basement bargain bin. 'Guys, I've got to get to dinner before I pass out.'

'Can you just wait like three minutes?' Callie stared at Jenny through her blondish eyelashes, which she usually covered with mascara. She had on a baby blue ruffle-front Juicy Couture blouse and a flowered Robert Rodriguez high-waisted skirt that cost more than a first-class plane ticket. 'I'm almost done.'

Tinsley stuffed a hand in the pocket of her black, slim-fitting Earl jeans and pulled out a crushed packet of Trident.

‘Here, have some gum.’ She tossed the pack lazily in Jenny’s direction.

‘Fine.’ Jenny popped a piece of spearmint gum in her mouth and straightened the framed poster of van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* hanging over her desk. ‘But really . . . three minutes. I missed lunch.’

She slid into her desk chair, ignoring the fascinating story behind the acquisition of Callie’s newest pair of Costume National boots, and logged into her e-mail. A message from Casey, the hot college freshman from Union she’d met over break at Yvonne Stidder’s Upper East Side party, sat open in her in-box. He’d written a flirtatious note Sunday night about not being able to sleep from thinking about her. She smiled to herself. It felt good to be wanted by a college guy. She imagined him lying in his dorm’s common room, breathlessly telling his friend he’d fallen head over heels. (Did guys say things like that? Not likely.) After spending the rest of the weekend, post-Casey, eating leftovers from her father’s kooky vegan Thanksgiving feast, she was grateful to be back at Waverly Academy.

A new e-mail appeared in Jenny’s inbox, from a Waverly e-mail address she didn’t recognize. The subject line *Popular?* intrigued her.

Dear Jenny,

Hi! Sorry to bother you, as I’m sure you’re very busy, but we wanted to ask you a favor. We were talking about

our final project for Dr Jackson's freshman film class and Claire was like, 'We should totally make a documentary of a popular Waverly girl.' Basically, we'd like to follow you around and film all the cool things you do in a normal day with your friends. Sort of like a week in the life of a popular girl?

We'd love to start getting footage right away, so please think about it. (And please say yes, please, please, please.)

– Kaitlin Becker, Claire Goodrich, and Izzy Vanderbeek

'You're not going to believe this,' Jenny squealed, leaning back in her chair. She stared at her computer screen. Someone wanted to make a movie about *her*? They thought *she* was the most popular girl in school? Not Tinsley or Brett or Callie or any one of the dozens of taller, thinner, more glamorous girls at Waverly?

'What?' Tinsley swung her legs off the bed and pulled her straight, glossy hair into a bun. Her smooth cheeks had spots of pink on them, and there was a cheerful gleam in her eyes. The glow had been there ever since Yvonne Stidder's Thanksgiving party – ever since Tinsley had made up with Julian McCafferty, the tall, totally adorable freshman. Jenny had never thought that Tinsley was *unhappy* until she saw what she looked like *happy*. 'Did Zac Efron finally "friend" you?'

Jenny stuck her tongue out. 'Nooo,' she said, standing up and nonchalantly smoothing out her dark red ABS cords. She grabbed her fuzzy pink and white striped scarf from

the hook on the back of the door and casually draped it around her neck. 'I have a fan club.'

'And that's news?' Callie asked dryly, tugging at the waist of her loose-fitting skirt. While Tinsley had been glowing since their return to Waverly, Callie had been cranky. Jenny knew that her breakup with Easy had bummed her out, but she was hoping she'd snap out of it soon enough. 'Everyone at Waverly adores you,' she added, kicking her empty suitcase into the bottom of her closet.

'Please.' Jenny's cheeks flushed, thinking of her not-too-distant encounter with Drew Gately, the senior guy who'd tried to manipulate her into sleeping with him. He didn't exactly adore her – he just liked the idea of deflowering a naïve sophomore. 'You know that's not true.' Then she remembered that she'd actually won the Halloween costume competition – people had voted for *her*. A burst of confidence surged through her as she shook out her loose brown curls and slipped her arms into her short red peacoat, hoping Callie and Tinsley would take the hint. 'A few girls want to make a movie about me for their freshman film class.'

Tinsley flicked off Callie's Bose iPod player and grabbed her dove gray Michael Kors coat, still wet from the snow, from where she'd dropped it on Jenny's bed. 'I thought you'd given up your porn career.'

Callie snickered, finally grabbing her pale beige wool coat from the back of her chair and throwing it on. 'Yeah, I thought Hardbody Humphrey was retired.'

'Ha-ha,' Jenny scoffed back, but the hair on the back of

her neck stood up. Why couldn't Tinsley and Callie ever take her seriously? As much as she liked them, she couldn't help wondering if they were always going to see her as some kind of less-cool imitation of them, a sweet but too-short tagalong they couldn't quite shake. 'It's for a documentary, silly. They want to call it *Popular*, or something like that.'

Tinsley and Callie burst into giggles as the three girls shuffled out the door. 'Seriously?' Callie asked, towering over Jenny in her high-heeled Badgley Mischka ankle boots. 'You're going to let some freshmen follow you around with a video camera?'

'Are they going to follow you to class?' Tinsley piped up, pulling down a red cashmere cap and patting her pockets for her wallet. 'To the gym?'

'To the shower?' Callie snorted, the heels clicking on the damp marble stairway.

'*Popular*,' Tinsley intoned in a movie-phone voice as she pulled on her red leather gloves. 'Starring Jennifer "Hardbody" Humphrey.' She started humming some kind of sleazy, porno-sounding music before she and Callie completely dissolved into laughter.

Jenny sighed heavily and buttoned her coat over her ample chest. They could laugh all they wanted, but just wait until they saw her starring in some arty student film.

Outside, the sharp night air made her shiver. In the distance, she could see the glinting lights of the dining hall, and just the thought of the cheesy lasagna on the menu made her mouth water.

Tinsley lit a cigarette. While smoking was forbidden on Waverly grounds, Tinsley had spent enough cold winters in New England to know that from a distance, the smoke looked like warm breath from warm bodies. 'So, Ms. Vernon, what's it like being a single woman again?'

Callie's face tightened almost imperceptibly at the reference to her recent breakup. She pulled her powder blue earmuffs from her coat pocket and slipped them onto her ears. 'It's awesome,' she replied after a moment, her voice devoid of enthusiasm. 'I love not having to shave my legs. And I can eat whatever I want.'

This time, it was Tinsley and Jenny who exchanged glances. Callie was in no danger of gaining a clothing size anytime soon.

'It was about time.' Tinsley let out a huge breath of smoke. 'You guys were getting totally boring.'

Callie knew Tinsley was just trying to make her feel better, but it annoyed her anyway. 'Of course, as soon as I'm single, you're not,' Callie sniffed, feeling suddenly miserable. Tinsley had her little freshman boy toy Julian now. And Jenny had – well, whomever she wanted. No matter how much Callie tried to convince herself it was fun to be on her own, in truth she totally missed Easy. She'd loved him so much, but staying together while he was at military school had just been so *hard*. She couldn't stand not knowing when – or if – they could be together again. And the promise ring he'd sent her, while incredibly

romantic, had been too much. But even though she knew she'd made the right decision, she missed the feeling of knowing someone was thinking about her, or about kissing her. . . .

A coy smile played on Tinsley's lips. 'Chill out, Cal. It's not like I'm getting *married*.'

Callie rolled her eyes. In New York over the break, after being sent the promise ring by Easy, she'd practically picked out her wedding dress from the Vera Wang window, much to Tinsley's amusement. 'That's probably a good thing, since Julian is, like, twelve.'

'Maybe it'll be good for you to be on your own for a while,' Jenny spoke up, her tiny voice cheerful but cautious.

'I know, I know.' Callie shook her head dismissively and rubbed her cold, gloved hands together. 'It's just . . . I'm used to having a boyfriend,' she confessed, realizing it even as she said it. 'Before Easy, there was Brandon.'

'Actually, they kind of overlapped,' Tinsley quipped, flicking her half-finished cigarette into a snowbank. She'd never let Callie forget how she'd hooked up with Easy when she was still dating Brandon. 'And when you were a freshman, you and Ethan Lasser were totally inseparable.'

Even the memory of Ethan Lasser – who was always slipping funny little notes into her mailbox – made a lump form in Callie's throat. She thought of all the fancy dinners Brandon had taken her to at Le Petit Coq on Saturday nights when no parties were going on. And how she and Easy always used to sit in the back row of campus plays and

concerts so they could skip out early to make out. Then she thought of having fancy dinners – alone. Going to see horrible student plays or the free Saturday afternoon movies in Berkman-Meier hall – alone. Callie suddenly couldn't recall a single Waverly social event she'd ever attended on her own, and panic seized her. 'I have no idea what it's like to be single at this school,' she said, a heavy sense of dread settling into the pit of her stomach.

Tinsley laughed and rubbed her gloves up and down her arms. Her carefree giggle cut through Callie. *What* was so funny? 'You need to get on some medication,' Tinsley said, tossing snow into the air. 'You act like you don't know how to have a good time. There are more things in life than . . .' Before she could finish, her phone buzzed in her pocket, and she quickly scrambled to pull out her black Nokia.

Callie glanced up at the steps of the dining hall, dreading going inside and having to face everyone. Why did breaking up with Easy make her feel lonely instead of free? She couldn't help but feel sad. The Callie-Easy era was over.

'It's Julian.' Tinsley was unable to keep the giddy grin off her face. 'You girls go in – I'll just be a second.'

'Later,' Callie said coldly, following Jenny up the steps. As they pushed through the heavy oak double doors of the dining hall, Brandon Buchanan called out Jenny's name. She headed over to a table full of boys, and Callie was left standing alone in the doorway, hesitating. The smell of overcooked pasta hit her nose, and suddenly

Callie's unshaven legs felt scratchy in her smooth black tights.

Oh my God, she couldn't help thinking. I have hairy legs and I'm going to die alone.



**A WAVERLY OWL NEVER GAMBLES . . . UNLESS IT'S
A SURE THING.**

The whir of the cappuccino machine rose over the hum of study-group chatter in Maxwell Hall. A fire crackled in the massive stone fireplace, and outside the large, arched windows the snow fell steadily down in the dark December evening. Brett Messerschmidt's almond-shaped green eyes scanned the lounge, eyeing the well-dressed Waverly Owls enjoying warm cups of coffee, their snow-covered parkas and peacoats tossed aside temporarily. Now that Thanksgiving break was over, Waverly students were reluctantly starting to prepare for finals.

At last Brett spotted who she'd been looking for. Of course, when she'd sent Sebastian Valenti to grab them a seat, she hadn't meant the overstuffed rust-colored velveteen

love seat smack in the middle of the room, directly in the line of vision of every single curious eye at Waverly. But with his shiny black Nikes propped up on the low coffee table, and his black Adidas track jacket unzipped halfway down his chest to reveal a tight white T-shirt, Sebastian looked like he didn't give a shit who saw him.

Brett sighed and walked toward him, stepping carefully over the well-worn Oriental throw rugs, damp with sludge tracked in from outdoors. 'Here.' She handed him one of the two lattes she'd just bought from the coffee bar. 'Congratulations,' she added, a little petulantly.

Sebastian puffed out his chest. 'You know I couldn't have passed that test without you. Have a seat.' He casually slung an arm over the back of the love seat, as if that made it more inviting.

Brett eyed the space on the couch next to him. It seemed . . . well, awfully cozy for a tutor to be sharing a love seat with her tutee, even if she was buying him coffee to celebrate his acing yesterday's Latin exam. But her mind wandered back to Thanksgiving break, when they'd certainly been friendly. Faced with spending the whole holiday with the Coopers, her sister Bree's ridiculously uptight future in-laws from Greenwich, Connecticut, Brett had invited Sebastian over for Thanksgiving dinner to make things more interesting. It had worked – the Coopers had fled quickly, mortified by Sebastian's slicked-back hair and appetite for Mountain Dew. And Brett had actually had a surprising amount of fun hanging out with Sebastian.

Until, that was, he'd overheard Brett telling Bree she'd invited him for the sole purpose of pissing off the Coopers, and he'd stormed out. Which left Brett to show up at his house Sunday morning to apologize and beg for a ride back to Waverly. They'd had a nice time, but it still irked Brett that she'd been forced to say sorry to cocky Sebastian. She had been blatantly in the wrong, of course, but there had been a shift in their balance of power, and now Brett was struggling to level things again.

'Yes, that's true.' Brett sat down primly on the other cushion of the love seat, tugging down the hem of her cap-sleeved heather gray Free People sweaterdress. 'You'd be nothing without your fearless tutor,' she teased, crossing her legs and tapping the toe of her flat black Børn riding boot against the coffee table.

Sebastian leaned back against the cushions and took a long sip from his Waverly logo coffee cup. 'Oh, come on, like you're not getting anything out of this too?' He cocked his head, a satisfied grin on his handsome face. He was a good-looking guy, in spite of his overly greased *Sopranos*-reject hairdo. 'Admit it: you're going to miss me.'

Brett narrowed her eyes at him. 'What are you talking about?'

'Well, I didn't know how to break it to you, but this is gonna be our last study session for a while.'

'Oh, really?' Brett blew across the top of her cup, trying not to sound surprised – and a little rejected. She was the one who had to do all the work here. Getting Sebastian to

memorize flash cards was harder than making your way through the crowds at Macy's on the day after Thanksgiving. 'You get an A-minus on one test and suddenly you don't need me anymore?'

'God, it's hot when you get all defensive.' Sebastian reached out and patted Brett's arm, but she pulled it away as if she'd been burned.

'Can you stop being a pig for once and just tell me what you're talking about?'

Sebastian trained his dark brown eyes on her, and she felt herself squirm. 'I was in Horniman's office this morning, bragging about my A . . .'

'A-minus,' Brett corrected, leaning back into the corner of the couch. Mrs Horniman was their shared faculty adviser, and the one who had roped Brett into tutoring the failing Sebastian in the first place.

Sebastian rolled his eyes to the vaulted ceiling. 'Right. Anyway, I was telling Horniman how I hadn't started any college applications yet, and she—'

'You haven't started your applications yet?' Brett interrupted, astonished. Most seniors had been working on their apps for *months*. Brett even knew a couple of nerds in the junior class who had already started drafts of their essays – and not that she'd admit it to anyone, but she had a whole file in her computer of brainstormed ideas for her Brown personal essay. (Everything from 'Why I Went to Boarding School' to 'Life with Bright Red Hair.' Good thing she still had a year to work on it.) 'Are you crazy? Deadlines are, like, in a few weeks.'

‘God, you even *sound* like her.’ Sebastian casually raised a hand and patted down his greased-back hair, which was in no danger of moving. ‘She told me it was unacceptable for a Waverly Owl not to apply to college, and said she wanted me to spend the next two weeks “hunkering down” and filling out paperwork.’

‘That’s probably a good idea.’ Brett pressed her lips together, wondering why she felt so out of sorts at the idea of not having to tutor Sebastian anymore. It wasn’t as if tutoring was any fun. And she’d have a little more time to concentrate on studying for her own finals. But suddenly, the image of Sebastian, sitting on the floor of her family room, rubbing the ears of her mother’s squealing Teacup Chihuahuas, flashed through her mind. She quickly squashed it. ‘So where are you applying?’

Sebastian shrugged. ‘The Waverly standards. You know. Yale, Cornell, Middlebury.’ He glanced at Brett, as if daring her to contradict him. ‘Brown. I might as well try, right?’

Brown? Brett pursed her lips. ‘If you spend half the time on your applications that you do sculpting your hair, you won’t have to even worry about getting in.’

Sebastian chose to ignore her remark. ‘I’ll be up to my elbows in college guidebooks and applications,’ he said, rubbing his chin. He’d been kind of quiet all day, and Brett suddenly realized that maybe he was feeling down about having to fill out college applications? Or maybe . . . over not getting to see her?

‘Well,’ Brett said slowly, ‘if you need help . . .’

‘You offering your services, tutor?’ A familiar self-satisfied grin covered Sebastian’s face, and Brett felt irritated that she actually cared about his future prospects. ‘Just be sure to call ahead, so I can get you on the schedule. Nothing fires the ladies up like looking through college apps, eh?’

Brett’s back stiffened. How dare he think that she – junior class prefect, straight-A student, one of the hottest girls at Waverly – would *wait in line* to spend time with him? He was such an arrogant prick – or he would be, if the idea of Waverly girls actually lining up outside his door weren’t so comically absurd. ‘Yeah, right. I’m sure all the girls at Waverly are dying to sit in your room and watch you fill out application forms,’ she chided, draining the last of her latte. ‘That’ll be the day.’

Sebastian leaned forward on the couch. ‘You don’t think I know what the ladies want?’ He studied her face again and Brett had to glance away, staring instead at the massive fireplace. ‘Throw a polo shirt on me and all the girls in this place will be clawing each other to get at me. It’ll be like the Beatles, circa 1974.’

‘The Beatles broke up in 1970, genius,’ Brett countered snidely. She examined his too-tight T-shirt, too-tight track jacket, too-greasy hair. All of it screamed *tacky*, and the girls at Waverly tended to prefer guys who subtly smelled like a Ralph Lauren store to those who bathed in Drakkar Noir.

So why was she so worried?

Sebastian waved a hand in her face. ‘Whatever. It’ll be like the Jonas brothers, circa now.’

Brett burst out laughing. Somehow Sebastian always knew how to derail her line of argument. ‘*Whatever* is right.’ Brett smirked. ‘I’ll believe it when I see it.’

‘So beautiful, so skeptical.’ Sebastian shook his head mockingly. ‘I just love to prove you wrong, Red.’

‘I won’t hold my breath.’ Brett glanced up to see Benny Cunningham staring at her and Sebastian. She couldn’t imagine someone like Benny, with her pearl drop earrings, her two-hundred-million-dollar trust fund, and her blue-blooded Philadelphia heritage, ever giving Sebastian the time of day. Maybe it would be good for his ego – his massive ego – for him to be proven so devastatingly wrong.

‘A friendly wager,’ he insisted, holding out his hand.

Brett glanced down. A shiny gold watch hung loosely on his wrist. This was going to be even easier than she’d thought.