



A WAVERLY OWL ALWAYS WELCOMES NEW
STUDENTS TO THE WAVERLY COMMUNITY.

The chapel bell tolled on that cold January morning, alerting the Waverly Academy student body that there were only five minutes before the dean's first address of the brand-new year. Jenny Humphrey took a deep breath of crisp air as she bolted down one of the salted paths crisscrossing the snow-covered quad. Her fleece-lined Camper boots crunched against the snow, and the ends of the long gold-and-white scarf her mother had sent from Prague trailed behind her like a flag. It was the Monday morning after Christmas break, and the scene was still unblemished by footprints and snowball fights. The sloping roofs of the brick school buildings were covered in white, looking like so many gingerbread houses. It made Jenny fall in love with Waverly Academy all over again.

Up ahead, a crowd of students streamed into the stone chapel, eager to get Dean Marymount's welcome-back-to-campus address

over with. “You’re so tan, Jenny!” Sage Francis exclaimed, waving from the top of the stairs. Her pin-straight corn silk–blond hair stuck out from underneath a hand-knit pink-and-white-striped beret. “I can’t believe you got to spend two weeks in the Bahamas with the Vernons.”

“Your freckles really came out.” Benny Cunningham eyed Jenny critically as she expertly tied her striped Waverly tie into a perfect Windsor knot. It had taken Jenny about twenty tries in front of the mirror to get her own knot right. Benny’s camel Michael Kors coat flapped open over her regulation maroon Waverly blazer. Marymount’s first chapel address meant everyone had to dress alike—at least for the morning.

“Just one week,” Jenny corrected Sage, ignoring Benny’s passive-aggressive freckle comment as the girls waited for the crowd to move through the door. She’d spent Christmas in New York with her dad, Rufus, and brother, Dan, and then a week with Callie Vernon, her beautiful Southern belle roommate, at her family’s retreat in Nassau. As they packed to go home for break, Callie had begged her to come along on their family vacation, not wanting to be left alone with her parents. Jenny was a little intimidated by the idea of spending a week with Callie’s glamorous Georgia-governor mother and international real estate magnate father. But they’d been surprisingly easygoing, spending the days on their laptops and cell phones and letting the girls do as they pleased—which mostly consisted of parking their rattan beach mats on the warm sand and soaking up the sun. Jenny made her way through the condo’s complete collection of Agatha Christie books as well as two whole tubes of Neutrogena Ultra Sheer sunblock.

“Really, I hope you used lotion with a high SPF,” Benny, whose pale skin looked downright Casperesque, added. The three girls elbowed their way through the heavy oak doorway into the chapel. “Tropical sun practically guarantees skin cancer and wrinkles,” she said with a tone of authority.

Jenny almost laughed. At Constance Billard, her old school back in New York City, she was always jealous of her classmates who came back tanned and gorgeous from their breaks in Palm Beach or St. Lucia. Now, she was actually one of them.

“Grab your seats, Owls!” Ms. Rose, Jenny’s English teacher, directed. She clapped her hands and attempted to shepherd the slow-moving students inside. Even the faculty was required to wear their regulation blazers and ties for the first chapel meeting, and the petite teacher could easily have passed for a student.

The high-ceilinged chapel was warm and humid. The aisles were crowded with boys in wrinkled blazers, slapping one another’s backs and exchanging elaborate knuckle-bumping handshakes. Girls hugged and chattered about their family trips to Anguilla or Aspen.

“Jenny!” Alison Quentin, Jenny’s friend from art class, called to her from a bench near the front of the chapel. “I saved you a seat.”

Jenny squeezed past a pack of giggling soccer team girls admiring the diamond-encrusted tennis bracelet on Rifat Jones’s wrist. She slid onto the hard wooden bench next to Alison. “How was your break?” Jenny asked, unwinding her scarf from her neck. She shook some melting snow off her long brown curls. “You were in Connecticut, right?”

“Boring. So glad to be back to civilization.” Alison rolled her eyes and pushed up the frayed sleeves of her blazer. “Listen, what are you doing for Jan Plan? Verena and I decided last night to write and perform a one-act play, but we need another person to make it work. Do you want in?”

Jan Plan was one of Waverly Academy’s greatest institutions. Instead of regular classes, students spent the month of January on campus working on one less-conventional learning project. Most people worked in pairs or small groups, on anything from tracking precipitation patterns in Rhinecliff to writing a paper about the representation of beauty in *Ugly Betty*. There was a handful of classes taught by Waverly profs for the students who couldn’t function without the regular class structure, but they were far more fun than your average chem or algebra class: popular choices were Knitting 101, Music Appreciation, and various language immersion courses that meant spending hours in the screening room watching foreign films and eating popcorn. Best of all, students were graded on a pass/fail basis. Which naturally meant sleeping late, and parties every night.

“Thanks for asking,” Jenny said, stuffing her pink Gap gloves into her blazer pockets. She shifted her knees to the side to let a bulky football player squeeze past. “But I was kind of hoping to work on this art project I’ve been thinking about.”

After taking two amazing fall-semester art classes—advanced figure drawing and portraiture—Jenny was dying to put what she learned toward a solo art project. Over break, she’d been standing at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street, watching the people stream across the street as the WALK

sign blinked on. Wet snow drifted down from the sky, and something about the way the people were moving made Jenny wish she had a camera—or that she *were* a camera. She tried to imagine what the photograph would look like if she left the shutter open: the garbage cans and mailboxes on the sidewalk would stay the same, but the people would be just a beautiful blur of motion. Immediately, she knew she wanted to try and replicate that impression with her own eyes and hands.

Which was going to be tricky, since students were encouraged to work together for Jan Plan. Technically, only juniors and seniors were allowed to work alone with permission from their advisers. “Ms. Rose said I’ll need to get permission from Marymount to do it on my own.”

Alison ran a tube of cherry ChapStick across her lips. “Good luck. You know what a grouch he can be.”

Jenny nodded slowly. She was dreading asking Dean Marymount for permission to work alone on her project, especially since she’d already been in trouble so many times this year. What could she possibly say to make him believe she was a responsible, rule-abiding Owl? “Wait, where is Dean Marymount?” Jenny asked, craning her neck to see if she could spot him up by the stage. The chapel bell had finished chiming five minutes ago, and a murmur ran through the crowd as students began to realize that something wasn’t quite right.

“*That* is not Marymount,” Alison whispered. The entire student body watched as a tall man with a head of thick steel-gray hair strode confidently across the stage. He was in his late forties, dapper, and looked like he could have played James Bond

in a different life—a far cry from the balding, sweater-vest-wearing Dean Marymount. “Is that Armani?” Alison asked, nodding at his expensive-looking suit.

By the time James Bond had reached the podium at the center of the stage, the entire chapel was abuzz with conversation. “Everyone, please.” He raised a single hand into the air. “There’s no need to panic.” The man had a deep, soothing voice, and, as if by magic, the room grew silent. “Dean Marymount is alive and well, but there’s been a change in the administration. My name is Dr. Henry Dresden, and I’m your new dean.”

The chapel gave a collective gasp.

“Things are going to be a little different with me in charge,” Dr. Dresden chuckled, and smoothed his royal blue tie. “I’ll be down in the trenches with you. I’ll be teaching a class spring semester—Advanced Comp Lit, for those of you unlucky enough to be in it.” He gave a half grin to the stunned students.

“Ohmigod. Is it too late to register?” Alison whispered, nudging Jenny sharply in the ribs.

“Also, working among you will be my own children, Isaac and Isla.” He tilted his face slightly to smile at a boy and a girl sitting at the edge of the stage. Jenny hadn’t noticed them before. They were both about sixteen or seventeen, with dark wavy hair and pale green eyes . . . and incredibly good-looking. They wore maroon Waverly blazers that still had a starched, brand-new look to them.

“Someone answered my prayers.” Ryan Reynolds leaned forward against the back of Jenny’s pew to punch Lon Baruzza on the arm. “I got dibs on the chick.”

Alison rolled her eyes. “Good luck with that.” The dean’s daughter, whose wavy brown hair looked perfectly tousled, tucked her plaid Burberry skirt tighter around her knees, as if she knew all the boys in the crowd were staring at her.

Jenny turned her eyes to the boy. He was adorable, with dark, slightly curled hair and smooth, tanned skin. Her stomach dropped when she realized he was staring straight at her. A faint smile appeared on his lips, as if he liked what he saw.

Her heart pounded at twice its normal speed. Was she imagining it? The boy’s striking green eyes held a playful look, a challenge to hold his gaze. Suddenly, the art project that had seemed so important five minutes ago was the furthest thing from her mind.

Jenny was used to being the new kid on campus, but now she was happy to relinquish the title.



TinsleyCarmichael: Think Marymount got fired? Or that his wife caught him with Pardee and made him leave Waverly?

CallieVernon: Who cares? This dean seems so chill.

TinsleyCarmichael: Too bad he wasn't dean when Easy was around.

CallieVernon: I know. Maybe then I'd still have a boyfriend.

TinsleyCarmichael: And his hottie kids? That's not going to hurt his popularity.

CallieVernon: U have a boyfriend, don't forget. Leave the hotties for us spinsters.



OwlNet

Instant Message Inbox

RyanReynolds: I officially call dibs on the dean's daughter.

AlanStGirard: No dice, bro. We all saw her at the same time.

RyanReynolds: That's why I'm calling dibs!

AlanStGirard: Sorry. All's fair in love and hot chicks.



A WAVERLY OWL SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND THE
MYSTERIES OF HUMAN NATURE—ESPECIALLY IF SHE
CAN GET SCHOOL CREDIT FOR IT.

Callie Vernon yawned as she stepped through the oversize doors of the dining hall. It resembled an old English cathedral, with thick stone walls and an arched ceiling. The walls were lined with black-and-white class pictures dating back to Waverly's founding and shots of the campus when it was little more than two brick buildings and the chapel. Callie's parents had met at Waverly and were both in one of the class photographs. It made her both slightly nervous and slightly annoyed that she couldn't escape their watchful eyes even a thousand miles away.

Callie dragged her feet over to the cereal bar. She'd found it almost impossible to get out of bed that morning, her body still on the sleep-till-noon schedule of her Caribbean vacation. After

pouring herself a bowl of MultiGrain Cheerios and a glass of orange juice, her hazel eyes scanned the breakfast crowd. The hall was a sea of alarmingly similar maroon-clad bodies, and it took her a moment to single out the adorably sun-freckled Jenny, her Bahamian companion, and her other best friend, Tinsley Carmichael. They were sitting at a long oak table in front of the fireplace with Benny and Sage and a bunch of other Dumbarton girls.

“Nice hair,” Tinsley said cheerfully, reaching out to flick Callie’s messy ponytail. She wore a thin black T-shirt and a pair of narrow-wale black Earl cords. How did Tinsley always manage to just throw things on and still look so good? “Looks like you’re still on vacation time.”

Callie slid her tray onto the table, her skim milk spilling over the edge of her cereal bowl. “Leave me alone. I’m in sunlight withdrawal.”

A dreamy look came across Jenny’s wide brown eyes. “I still keep thinking about the warm powdery sand.”

“We *get* it already.” Benny Cunningham leaned her elbows on the table, twirling her platinum Tiffany rings around her finger. “You guys lounged in the Caribbean while I was stuck in the snow. Can we talk about something else, please?”

Callie eased off her Waverly blazer and set it on the back of her chair. She’d had it since freshman year, and the elbows were wearing thin. “Don’t hate me because I’m tan.”

Sage Francis giggled as she spread low-fat cream cheese across her toasted onion bagel. “Benny’s just bitter that her fam called off their annual trip to Aruba. She had to make do with a week in London instead.”

Benny smirked at Sage. “Can you blame me? My skin looks paler than Nicole Kidman’s, and now there’s this hottie dean’s son to impress.” She tossed her banana peel onto Sage’s tray. “We should invite him to work on our Jan Plan project with us.”

Sage stuffed the banana peel into Benny’s half-empty water glass. “What’s his name? Ivan?”

Callie exchanged a raised eyebrow with Tinsley, who was languidly mixing strawberries into her plain yogurt. Benny and Sage had a history of throwing themselves at any new guy who stepped on campus. Usually they wound up scaring him off.

“Isaac, I think.” Jenny spoke up, glancing around the crowded dining hall as if to check for his presence.

Callie eyed her petite, curvy roommate. It had been fun to have Jenny with her on vacation. Tinsley had had other plans for break—involving her glued-to-the-hip boyfriend, Julian—and the thought of hanging out alone with her parents made Callie hyperventilate. Jenny was laid back and easy to please. And even though she drew a fair amount of stares on the beach in her cute navy polka-dotted J. Crew suit, slender Callie, in her sexy black-and-gold Dior string bikini, didn’t feel threatened. She owned that beach—at least for a week.

“Hey, what are you guys doing for your Jan Plan projects?” Callie changed the subject. Jan Plan was everyone’s favorite time of year. It was four weeks of heaven: you got to be on campus with your friends and not have any real responsibilities. Some of the students were away—like Brett Messerschmidt, another one of Callie’s best friends, who was in New York working on

a *Vogue* internship her sister had arranged. The nerdier students tended to have more academic plans, like performing a mock trial or spending the whole month reading a horribly long, boring classic novel from the seventeenth century and writing a paper about how it was still relevant today. Callie didn't get why anyone would work so hard for a pass/fail grade. "I still don't have one yet."

Sage twirled a piece of her pale blond hair around her finger. "Benny and I are going to be studying gender roles in contemporary film."

Tinsley, who acted scandalized anytime someone suggested watching a movie that wasn't either black-and-white or filmed in another language, took a small sip of grapefruit juice and rolled her eyes. "So you're using it as an excuse to watch *Made of Honor* for the billionth time?"

"Among other things," Benny trilled. She waved over Emily Jenkins, who was stuffing pieces of fruit into her pockets. "Emily's going to be studying the effects of exercise on stress."

"Groundbreaking," Tinsley whispered to Callie, who almost choked on her orange juice.

"I'm leading a Pilates class on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the dance studio, in case anyone's interested," Emily offered, wrapping her scarf tighter around her neck. "I can't believe this counts as school."

"Neither can I," Callie replied dryly, slicing up a banana into her bowl of Cheerios. Of course Emily Jenkins would use Jan Plan as a way to drop a jeans size.

"You ready to go back?" Benny stood up, throwing her

crumpled napkin onto her tray. “I thought maybe we’d watch *27 Dresses* to warm us up.”

Tinsley made a gagging sound in her throat as the three girls disappeared. “At least Brett’s doing something cool. I can’t believe she’s got an internship at *Vogue*.”

“Yeah, but it’s weird she’ll be away.” Jenny wiped a smudge of raspberry jam off her cheek. “I bumped into Sebastian in Maxwell last night and he looked miserable.”

Now *Callie* wanted to throw up. “I can’t *believe* how off track I was with that whole Sebastian thing.” It was hard to believe that just a month ago, she was—kind of—dating Sebastian Valenti herself. That “relationship” was a perfect example of Callie convincing herself of something that didn’t really exist. She’d believed in unicorns until she was eleven, despite all evidence to the contrary, simply because she’d wanted to. Bored and lonely after breaking up with Easy Walsh, she’d suddenly felt like she was destined to be alone. She’d needed a boyfriend.

And then Sebastian had strolled into the room, representing a world of opportunity. A blank slate. Of course, Callie didn’t realize he was Brett’s tutee the first time she saw him—or that Brett had already set her sights on him. Callie had thrown herself at Sebastian, ignoring his less-appealing qualities, only to end up getting dumped for Brett, with whom he’d been in love the whole time. “The funny thing is—I didn’t even really like him. I mean, his idea of romantic was Bon Jovi and pizza. Ew.” Callie shook her head as if to shake off the memory.

“You certainly did a good job convincing yourself of it,” Tinsley pointed out. Tinsley latched and unlatched the antique



platinum chain bracelet she wore around her wrist—probably a romantic Christmas present from her boyfriend, Julian McCafferty. Callie consoled herself with the fact that Julian was a freshman. He didn't even have a learner's permit yet.

"That's what's so weird about it." Callie shifted in her seat as she flicked an imaginary piece of lint off her blazer. "I didn't *feel* like I was convincing myself. He was hot, and everybody was drooling over him. Plus, I was starting to feel frantic about being alone. And then everything just kind of came together. . . ."

"You can't really think you'll be alone forever." Jenny's brown doe eyes widened. She looked tiny in her pink striped button-down and her Waverly blazer, the sleeves of which were a little too long for her.

"I don't know. It's just that I thought Easy was my true love, and then . . . it ended," Callie replied. She stared at the Cheerios floating in her skim milk. She'd always thought she and Easy would be together forever. But after he was expelled from Waverly, he practically disappeared from her life. His father had condemned him to a military school in the middle of the boonies, where he didn't have access to e-mail or a phone. It was too difficult to keep a relationship going when she couldn't ever see him—or even *talk* to him. By the time he sneaked away from school to meet her on Thanksgiving atop the Empire State Building, it was too late. Callie didn't totally understand why, but she knew it was over. "Does that mean it wasn't really true love? Or did I convince myself about Easy the same way I tricked myself into liking Sebastian?"



“Sounds like a brilliant psychology project to me.” Tinsley spread some Foul Play NARS gloss across her lips.

“I could totally do a Jan Plan project about the nature of love.” Callie straightened in her chair. “Is it something we cling to, just because it offers comfort? Do we have the power to convince ourselves we’re in love? Or is it a stronger feeling, one we can’t control?” Suddenly a wave of excitement washed over her. She flashed forward twenty years, to herself as a brilliant, Ivy League-educated love expert and best-selling author, signing books to adoring fans, many of whom happened to be male and gorgeous.

“I was being sarcastic,” Tinsley pointed out, taking a sip of her tea.

“I wasn’t.” Callie shrugged. “I want to talk to other people. Find out what makes them think they’re in love with someone.” Her eyes narrowed and focused on Tinsley, as she gathered up her bag and tossed her crumpled napkin on her tray. “You can be my first victim.”

Tinsley smiled sweetly and stood up. “Sorry, babe.” She tossed her head, her silky dark hair shimmering under the dining-hall lights. “You know I don’t like to kiss and tell.”

Callie snorted. “You *love* to kiss and tell.”

Tinsley’s blue-violet eyes twinkled. “Yeah, I guess I do. Speaking of kissing, I’ve got to go make out with Julian right now.” She blew Callie a kiss as she headed for the dining hall’s front doors.

Callie sniffed. True love was definitely something people made up just to annoy her.