Reckless

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Extract

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Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!

Sir Walter Scott



WAVERLY OWLS DO NOT KISS BOYS IN PUBLIC.

A cold, gray rain splattered against the huge plate glass windows of the art studio. Instead of focusing on the enormous sheet of newsprint sprawled on the desk in front of her, Jenny Humphrey found herself thinking about the love scene from *Match Point* where Jonathan Rhys Meyers practically devours Scarlett Johansson's head with his mouth out in the field in the pouring rain. Of course, if she had *her* way, it would be sexy Waverly Academy junior Easy Walsh devouring her head. (And like in the movie, it would be summer in the English countryside and not an ice-cold autumn day in upstate New York.) Sexy Waverly Academy junior Easy Walsh – who just happened to be her boyfriend.

Last week, frizzy-haired Mrs. Silver had invited Jenny,

Easy, and Alison Quentin to join her Wednesday afternoon Human Figure Drawing elective. She'd pulled them aside after their portraiture class and with a proud voice and a glint in her crinkly blue eyes said, 'You are my stars.' By joining the Human Figure Drawing class, she'd reasoned, they'd be able to get a better understanding of the body and enhance their already-impressive talents. Jenny had been thrilled – it was totally flattering to be taken aside after only a few weeks of class and told that she was talented. And the thought of getting to spend a little extra time with Easy didn't hurt, either.

When she arrived at the studio after lunch, Jenny took a seat near the door. In the center of the room was a large platform about a foot off the ground with a single chair on it. The desks were arranged around the platform in a semicircle. Her eyes scanned the class, hoping for a glimpse of Easy's adorable head of curly dark brown hair. She recognized a few people. Parker DuBois, the senior from France (or was it Belgium?) that the girls were always whispering about, a tall Indian girl from her field hockey team, a girl she and Brett had taken to calling the Girl in Black. Finally she spotted Easy way over by the supply closets. He'd been staring at her while she scoped out the class and gave her a little wave, making her heart flutter. Not that it wasn't already fluttering.

When Jenny wasn't daydreaming out the rainy window, she found the two-hour class to be wonderfully challenging.

Every five minutes Mrs. Silver asked a different student to go up and pose as directed. Fully clothed, of course, so it really wasn't anything to be embarrassed about, although Jenny didn't like the idea of the whole class drawing her giant boobs. Luckily, she wasn't called up. But Easy was. Mrs. Silver had him sit in the chair and tie his shoes, and Jenny couldn't help thinking how much better her drawing would be if he had his shirt off. Before class ended, Mrs. Silver circled the room and selected the very best sketches of the day (Easy's, Parker's, and Girl in Black's) for Friday's student gallery show, which not so accidentally coincided with Waverly's Trustee Weekend.

By the time the students were dismissed, the wind had picked up and it looked like an all-out monsoon outside. Good thing she was wearing her Jeffery Campbell rubber rain boots with their funky, multicolored floral design. Cute, yes – but functional, too. She'd read in *Real Simple* magazine on a rainy afternoon spent paging through the periodicals in Waverly's library (instead of memorizing Latin conjugations) that it was helpful to the psyche to wear something bright and colorful on dreary, wet days. Jenny had taken the advice to heart and used it as an excuse to buy the rubber boots and an adorable red vinyl Benetton trench coat that she'd found online – it was a kids size and a little tight around the chest, but wearing it made her feel like smiling.

Not that she needed *another* reason.

Jenny stood up and removed the straps of her schoolbag from the back of her chair. 'Drop something?' she heard a low voice behind her say as something poked her gently in the back. She whirled around, and there was Easy, brandishing her pale pink umbrella like a fencing sword.

'You don't want to borrow it?' she offered, stepping aside to let the rest of the class escape.

'Not exactly my color.' Easy dropped his canvas messenger bag to the floor and slipped on his maroon Waverly blazer. The Waverly handbook, which Jenny had studied religiously before arriving at boarding school until realizing no one took it seriously at all, stated that all Waverly blazers had to be in an 'appropriately maintained' condition. Whatever that meant. Jenny was sure Easy's blazer, with its half-peeled-off crest, frayed cuffs, and permanent wrinkles, wouldn't make the cut.

'Don't be so sure. You look nice in maroon, and that's just a couple of shades away from pink on Mrs. Silver's color wheel,' she joked, taking her umbrella from him.

He leaned toward her conspiratorially. 'You look nice in every color.'

Jenny coughed to disguise the dopey grin she felt creeping across her face.

'And,' Easy continued, 'you look especially hot with charcoal gray on your cheeks.' He placed his hand on the small of her back and led her out of the studio.

'What?' Jenny peered at her reflection in one of the sculpture display cases lining the hallway. There was a splotchy gray shadow on her right cheek. Ack! There she was, thinking how romantic it would be if she was alone in the art studio with Easy, and the whole time he was wondering when she was going to notice the dirt on her face. Jenny quickly grabbed a tissue from the pocket of her jeans and dabbed at her cheeks. She needed some water but wasn't about to spit in front of Easy. Gross. She shrugged and stepped boldly through the main doors into the stormy afternoon. 'The rain will wash it off.'

She shook open her umbrella and held it over both their heads as they descended the stairs of the art building. 'Where are you off to?' Jenny asked, walking on her tiptoes to give Easy a little more headroom. Even though Jenny could already feel her hair frizzing in the dampness, she could appreciate the beauty of the chilly, drizzling rain. The Waverly quad still managed to look stunning – the grass looked unnaturally green, and the brilliant reds and oranges of the enormous oak trees were all cloaked in a lovely gray mist. It looked like a postcard. And she lived in it.

Easy patted the front pocket of his brown-and-white-striped T-shirt from Abercrombie & Fitch. It was so gauzy, it would probably disintegrate the next time it went through the wash. Jenny fought the urge to run her hands up and down his chest – to feel the shirt, of course. 'I'd

better head over to the stables and check on Credo. She gets a little freaked out by the rain.'

'Give her a carrot for me.' The day she met Credo had been the first time Jenny ever rode a horse – or kissed Easy Walsh. Time seemed to fly at Waverly. About a week and a half had gone by since Easy came back early from Tinsley Carmichael's Café Society party in Boston and snuck Jenny out to the bluffs to watch the sunrise. They'd talked, and kissed, and held each other. It was . . . heavenly. It was one of those things you don't quite expect to ever happen to you or, at least, not if you're short, curly-haired, giant-boobed sophomore Jenny Humphrey.

Easy smiled down at Jenny and kicked at one of the floodlights set to light up the carved swirling topiaries that lined the building's edge. 'You could come with me,' he suggested, a sheepish look crossing his face, as if he was thinking about giving someone other than Credo a nice, long rubdown.

Jenny twirled the umbrella playfully over their heads. Another rainy afternoon trapped inside the stables with Easy – alone? Sounded a little too tempting. She shook her head slowly. 'You know I'd love to, but it's probably not the best idea. I've got a giant English paper due on Friday, and I should really spend some quality time with my laptop in the library.'

She didn't want to sound like a tool, but she was getting good grades here and wanted to keep it up. Jenny

rested her umbrella-free hand on Easy's wrist; the contact with his skin gave her a rush that surpassed what she'd felt when she scored her first goal in last week's game against Briarwood Academy. Wait, she was turning him down to *study*? Was she insane?

'I guess I can wait,' Easy drawled in his adorable Kentucky accent. 'If you insist.' His dark blue eyes met Jenny's, and chills ran down her spine all the way to the toes of her perky rubber boots.

'We'll do something really fun this weekend,' Jenny promised as they made their way along the gravel path toward Dumbarton. 'We'll go riding on Friday and then grab some dinner after. Maybe I'll try a canter?'

Easy grinned. 'Excellent. I'll tell Credo you're up for a challenge this time.'

'No!' Jenny cried, bumping her hip against Easy and sending him out from under her umbrella and into the storm. 'Last time was challenging enough.'

Easy dove back underneath the umbrella and snaked his arm through hers. 'I'll walk you back to your room, then?'

Just the mention of the word *room* made her stiffen. Part, or actually most, of the reason for Jenny's newfound studiousness was because she was terrified of being alone with her roommate, Callie Vernon. Even the stuffy old library seemed like a cheerful alternative.

Jenny used to live in a quad with Callie, Tinsley, and

Brett Messerschmidt. But after Tinsley and Callie were caught sneaking back to Waverly after their presidential suite party at the Boston Ritz-Bradley, Dean Marymount split the girls up. The first week after Brett and Tinsley moved downstairs from Dumbarton 303 to Dumbarton 121 was the most uncomfortable one of Jenny's life – worse even than the time she'd gotten her period on a camping trip with her father in the wilds of Vermont and she'd had to wear the ancient diaper-like pads they'd sold at the nearest general store. Callie had this humiliating way of looking straight past Jenny, not even like she was ignoring her, but like she didn't even exist. It was probably the only way Callie could deal with the fact that her new roommate had captured her boyfriend's heart. Whether or not Jenny had done it on purpose was of no consequence to Callie. She *had* done it.

One evening, Jenny came home from the library to find Callie stuffing her freshly laundered clothes into her closet. (All the really rich kids sent their laundry out to the local Fluff 'n' Fold. Jenny felt like a total plebian for using the coin-run machines in the basement.) She noticed that Callie's long, normally wild strawberry blond locks had been chopped to just below her shoulders and sleekly layered. After much debate, Jenny finally said, 'Wow, your hair looks fabulous!' and totally meant it. But Callie only yawned and checked her teeth for lipstick stains in the mirror.

The only time Callie had spoken to her since the Boston weekend had been unpleasant, to put it politely. 'Is that a new dress?' Jenny had asked one afternoon, expecting no response as usual. After all, the question was pointless. Ever since the breakup with Easy, *all* of Callie's clothes were new. Crumpled packages from Saks and Barneys and Anthropologie piled higher in the trash every day, and shoe boxes from Missoni and Michael Kors were starting to stack up, unopened, by Callie's closet door. Callie spun around, her new hair falling into place as if it had been born that way, and said regally, 'Yes. And if there was any chance of it fitting you, I'd be concerned about you stealing *it*,' before stomping out of the room, leaving Jenny's mouth hanging open.

And so she had gone out of her way to give Callie the space she needed, making it a habit to wake up early, shower, get dressed, and escape, all before Callie even took off her purple silk eye mask and climbed out of bed. It was an exhausting, shadowy way to live, and Jenny was getting tired of having to always figure out when Callie would be out of the room so that she could sneak back in.

'You okay?' Easy raised the collar of his blazer to shield himself from the driving rain. Water was pooling on top of his Doc Martens of indeterminate color – black? Oxblood? Dirt-covered? One frayed yellow lace hung loose and trailed behind him, already muddy, as he shuffled

his feet against the gravel pebbles of the walkway with his toe. Even his shoes were cute.

'I guess I am.' Jenny suddenly dropped her umbrella to the grass beside the path and raised her face to the rainy sky, letting the cool drops splash onto her skin. She missed New York, just a little. Her new rubber boots would be perfect for splashing around in the puddles that must be forming right now in front of her building on West End Avenue and 99th Street.

Easy didn't seem to mind the impromptu shower. He stepped closer, and when she turned her face toward him, she saw his eyes sparkling with the rain, a dripping dark brown curl plastered to his forehead. 'You are so goddamned cute.' He leaned down and gently nuzzled his wet nose against hers before kissing her.

Truth was, if she had to see another girl with Easy, she'd hate her too. She didn't blame Callie. Despite her gorgeous new haircut and trendy new outfits, Callie was still hurting. But Jenny couldn't help it. Easy was amazing, and if she had to give up her friendship with Callie to be with him, so be it. He was totally worth it.

'You're ringing,' Jenny muttered softly, pulling away from Easy as she felt his phone vibrate in his blazer pocket.

'I didn't hear anything.' Easy grinned, putting both hands on Jenny's waist and pulling her back toward him.

'What if it's important?'

'More important than this?' he murmured. 'Impossible!'

They stayed like that, kissing in the rain in front of Dumbarton for a long time. Jenny stood on the lowest step and still had to raise her chin a little to meet Easy's gaze. And for the millionth time, she chased away the thought of how much easier it must have been for Callie to kiss him – she was about seven inches taller than Jenny.

But if she was having this much trouble not thinking about Callie and Easy and she was the one *with* him, poor Callie must be really tortured. Or maybe it was better to have had Easy once and then lost him than to never have had him at all. Jenny wasn't so sure. She certainly didn't want to find out.



OwlNet Instant Message Inbox

AlanStGirard: Just saw Marymount having a pretty intense cup of tea with Miss Rose at CoffeeRoasters – she the babe you caught him banging at the Ritz?

TinsleyCarmichael: So eloquent you are. But no.

AlanStGirard: Why won't you tell, gdamn it?

TinsleyCarmichael: Bcuz secrets are worth more than gossip, dummy. And I have a feeling that info could come in handy sometime.

AlanStGirard: You got any dirt on me?

TinsleyCarmichael: Ha. If you only knew . . . Just stay on my good side, ASG.



A WAVERLY OWL TAKES ADVANTAGE OF FORTUITOUS EVENTS.

'Hey, Princess,' Heath Ferro shouted as he flung open the door to the second-floor Richards dorm room he shared with Brandon Buchanan, his navy blue vintage Pumas soaked and squeaking noisily against the previously clean blond oak floor. 'Aw,' he cooed when he saw the drawn curtains and Brandon curled up beneath his extremely prissy, peach-colored chenille throw. 'Is Sleeping Beauty *still* sleeping?'

Asshole, Brandon cursed into his pillow. Maybe a person with a normal degree of self-awareness could walk into a room, notice the closed curtains, the Hammacher Schlemmer Sound Oasis machine tuned to 'Summer Night,' the body under the covers and think, *Maybe I* won't *stomp around like a moron*. Apparently that was too much to ask of Heath.

'Fuck off, Ferro,' Brandon growled as he raised his head from his pillow high enough to give Heath a withering glare. The problem with Heath – or *one* problem with Heath – was that he was too self-absorbed to give a shit whether or not his roommate was sleeping or studying or wallowing in self-pity. Heath came in only one volume: loud.

'Don't you have practice, dude?' Heath flicked on the light switch, and the darkened lair was flooded with fluorescent light. Brandon pulled the blanket up over his face.

Practice. Yeah, he had practice. And since he was junior captain of the squash team, he should probably get off his ass and show up. But the thought of smacking a stupid rubber ball around a fifteen-by-fifteen room with another sweaty guy – well, he just wasn't up for it today. Brandon had uncharacteristically skipped his last class of the day – the gray rainy day depressed him and made him want nothing more than to curl up in his cozy bed, take a long nap, and maybe never wake up.

That was a little morbid, yeah. But he hadn't been feeling himself since the weekend before last, when Callie Vernon had completely humiliated him by ordering him to watch some gay porno in front of everyone at the Ritz-Bradley party. Sure, he'd been acting a little overprotective – but Callie was making a total ass of herself, jumping up on the desk and drunkenly tearing off her clothes to try and keep up with Tinsley. It always made Brandon sick to

think about how little self-respect Callie had and how highly she esteemed the quite possibly sociopathic Tinsley. He couldn't help it – it killed him to see her acting like a mindless clone. He had asked her to come back to his room to talk in private. Or maybe do a little more than just talk. But Callie had mocked him, screaming at him to leave her alone.

Well, if that's the way she wanted it, fine. He was tired of obsessing over Callie. Besides, she was clearly not over artsy-fartsy Easy Walsh. He could tell the sole reason she'd gotten up on that dresser to do her little striptease was she'd caught Easy admiring Tinsley's body and it killed her. He found both Tinsley and Easy loathsome – and of course, Callie idolized both of them. He wasn't about to wait around for her to realize what soulless slimebags they were and come running back to him.

If only he had something better to do . . .

Brandon tossed off his ultra-soft blanket and set his bare feet on the cold wooden floor. He was already dressed for practice in his navy blue Adidas track pants with the orange stripes down the sides and one of the white Lacoste jersey tees that he bought by the dozen – he liked to wear them to practice, but once the armpits got sweat stains, he threw them out. 'Don't get your panties in a bunch, Ferro. I was just taking a quick catnap.'

'You said "panties" and "catnap" in the same sentence!!' Heath laughed maniacally as he pulled off his rain-soaked

white Diesel men's T-shirt with the words IN A MORAL PANIC emblazoned across the front, balled it up, and tossed it at Brandon's head. It missed and landed in a soggy heap on Brandon's desk. Nice. It was hard to imagine Heath's morals in a panic – he didn't have any.

Brandon crossed the room to his dresser, sighing as he stepped over the mucky footprints Heath had left behind, and pulled a pair of neatly rolled white Adidas gym socks from a drawer. His biting response to Heath was cut off indefinitely by the jangling of his black Treo on his oak bedside table.

Callie? Brandon flipped it open to see his father's number. Suppressing a groan, he answered. 'Good afternoon, Father.'

'You sound sleepy.' Mr. Buchanan's sonorous voice contained a touch of accusation. 'I hope I didn't wake you. Though why you would you be napping in the middle of a school day, I can't imagine.'

Great. He was sounding even more passive-aggressive than normal. Must be his mega-bitch twenty-something gold digger wife rubbing off on him. 'I was getting ready for practice. Is something wrong?' Mr. Buchanan was a weary man, older than his years – but Brandon guessed that's what came from starting a new family when you're already a legal senior citizen. Brandon's bratty twin half brothers, Zachary and Luke, were more annoying than Tom Cruise on speed. No wonder his dad worked so much.

Mr. Buchanan ignored his son's question or didn't hear it. 'I'm having dinner with Dean Marymount this Friday. I'd like you to come. Bring Callie.'

Dean Marymount? Callie? What the fuck was his dad talking about? 'You're coming . . . here?' Brandon asked, confused.

Mr. Buchanan sighed, and Brandon could hear train noises in the background. He must be on his commute to Greenwich from the city. 'Brandon, I hope you pay better attention to your studies than you do to your father. I have trustee meetings at Waverly all weekend. I told you about it months ago.'

'Trustee Weekend,' Brandon repeated. 'Sorry, it slipped my mind,' he added, although he knew his father had never mentioned it. Always better to take blame himself than expect his father to admit fault. But fuck – dinner with Dean Marymount? Did he really deserve that kind of punishment? And Callie? Guess he wasn't the only forgetful one. 'Um . . . maybe it slipped your mind that I broke up with Callie? About a year ago?'

'You never tell me anything,' Mr. Buchanan grumbled after a pause. 'Fine, then. Bring someone else. I don't want it to be just the three of us. That would be . . . rather dull, don't you agree?'

You think?

'Yeah, okay, I'll bring someone.' Parents were such freaks. 'Look, Dad, I've got practice.'

'All right, I hope you win. Make reservations for eight at that place – the French one.' Mr. Buchanan clicked off before Brandon could repeat that it was practice, not a game. You don't win at practice.

'Did you really say the magic words?' Heath asked the second Brandon tossed his phone into his black nylon squash bag. Heath was grinning like a five-year-old who'd just heard the jingle of the ice-cream truck.

'Huh?'

'Trustee Weekend,' Heath repeated, the rapturous expression spreading across his face. He still hadn't put on a shirt and was standing in the middle of the room in just a short pair of red Nike soccer shorts covered in grass stains. 'You know what that means.'

'Yeah. A bunch of self-important rich fogies come to town and make their poor, overworked sons eat frogs legs at Le Petit Cock with the fucking dean. It means torture.'

'No, moron,' Heath interrupted, grabbing a soccer ball and bouncing it expertly on his knee. 'It means a bunch of self-important rich fogies come to town, and everyone's so fucking busy falling over backward to keep them happy that they don't even notice what the fucking smarter-than-they-think students are doing. And that' – Heath grinned – 'means paaar-TAY!' He punctuated this by kicking the ball at Brandon's bookshelf and sending the contents of the top shelf sliding to the floor.

Brandon rolled his eyes. Heath had been kind of

impossible since the Boston weekend, when Tinsley's secret society made the brilliant decision to make Heath its next male target. Like his giant ego could get any more inflated. Brandon had left the party early, after Callie had humiliatingly chastised him in front of everyone, but he'd heard rumors about what had happened afterward. Supposedly Callie, Tinsley, and Heath had climbed up to the roof and danced around naked. But no one seemed to know for sure. All they knew was that when they woke up hung over and half dressed on the hotel suite floor in the morning, the three of them were gone. It sounded *très* suspicious to Brandon, but he and Callie weren't exactly in speaking mode – and the last thing on earth he wanted to hear was that she'd actually done something as stupid as sleep with Heath Ferro.

Because she wouldn't have, right?

Heath grabbed his BlackBerry and pressed a button on his speed dial. 'Trying to find a date for the weekend already?' Brandon quipped, pulling on his bright yellow waterproof windbreaker. Actually, he was the one who needed a date. Who the hell was he going to ask to come to dinner with his dad and Dean Marymount?

'As if,' Heath scoffed. 'I'm calling my buddy at Rhinecliff Liquors. What's a party without refreshments?'



OwlNet Instant Message Inbox

SageFrancis: Has Smail called off practice yet?

BennyCunningham: Just checked my email . . . we're meeting at Lasell instead, 4 sharp.

SageFrancis: Dibs on the Stairmaster with the best view of the soccer hotties stretching!

BennyCunningham: I don't know how the sweaty narsty gym can turn you on. . . .

SageFrancis: That's because you've never made out in a shower stall in the boys' locker room.

BennyCunningham: Oh, yeah? w/who?

SageFrancis: Guess you're going to have to wait for another game of T or D to find out.



A WAVERLY OWL DOES NOT RUMMAGE IN HER ROOMMATE'S BELONGINGS – SHE MIGHT FIND SOMETHING.

Rainy days always made Callie Vernon unbearably drowsy, and she could barely keep her eyes open during AP American History, something Mr. Wilde, the bookish thirty-something professor, seemed not to notice. Normally, his deep baritone voice and always slightly crooked smile were enough to keep Callie's attention, but not when 2 P.M. looked like 9 P.M. – it was a fucking monsoon out there. Field hockey practice had been canceled, which sounded nice but wasn't actually a treat in any sense of the word. Canceled practice meant everyone had to report to Lasell, the out-of-date fitness center, and spend an hour on the cardio machines, which Callie loathed. No matter how skinny she wanted to be,

she couldn't bear walking in place while everyone cooed at the boys jogging in the gym through the glass. Besides, Lasell smelled like feet. And on a rainy day like this, all the other teams would have canceled practice too, and the gym would be full of hot, sweaty, stinky boys.

Mr. Wilde dismissed the class. Callie, rapidly blinking to shake the sleep out of herself, passed him in the doorway; he smiled his crooked smile. 'Looks like you could use a nap.' That counted as teacher permission to skip practice, didn't it? Or at least show up late?

And so, an hour later, when Callie woke up from her afternoon *siesta*, a word her mother had taught her to use instead of *nap* (as the latter brought with it a lazy connotation), she yawned and hopped out of bed, wearing only her Calvin Klein French-cut black underwear and matching stretchy camisole. She could walk around naked if she wanted since she practically had a single now. Ever since Tinsley and Brett had moved out, she barely saw Jenny anymore. Callie woke up every morning to an empty room and crawled into bed after her nightly Pilates routine, the whole day having often gone by without her seeing her busty little roomie. And that's exactly the way she wanted it.

She might have been suspicious that Jenny was sleeping somewhere else – a thought that would have driven her mad with jealousy, as if little Jenny Humphrey could manage to sneak into the boys' dorm every night and have wild, passionate, illicit sex with Easy Walsh. But thankfully,

every morning the ginseng-honey scent of Jenny's Frederic Fekkai Curl Enhancing Lotion hung in the air assured Callie that her little pest of a boyfriend-stealing roommate was actually sleeping in her own bed. Or maybe she was just a super-early riser.

Jenny really seemed to be afraid of her. As well she should be.

Not that Callie's life wasn't better without Easy Walsh. Since they'd broken up (she'd convinced herself that it was mutual and that she had not actually been dumped on her skinny ass), Callie had managed to snag an A on her last bio test, score six goals in the last two field hockey games, and flirt with just about every single cute guy on campus. Last Thursday, she had received special permission to take the train into Manhattan for a 'medical emergency' and had spent the afternoon at Bergdorf-Goodman followed by six sample sales in the Garment District. Walking off the train at Rhinecliff station, arms loaded with bags of Theory clothes (trunk show!), wearing new Christian Louboutin platform espadrilles with sexy ankle ties and adorable butterflies embroidered on the toes, her newly cut, fresh-from-the-Red-Door-Salon-smelling blond locks six inches shorter and swooshing against her shoulders, she felt . . . lighter. And free! Although she'd feel a whole lot lighter if Easy wasn't dating her roommate. Or better yet, if he wasn't dating anyone at all.

Callie glanced at herself in her dresser mirror and shook

her head, enjoying the way her new haircut looked in motion. She bet Easy would like it.

Fuck. It was so hard to turn off feelings that had been alive and pulsing for over a year. Just because Easy suddenly decided he was better off with a silly little pink-cheeked sophomore with stripper-sized breasts, she was supposed to just get over it? It was hard. For twelve months, Easy had been the one in her thoughts as she crawled into bed at night. When she saw a pretty white wedding gown in a magazine, it was Easy she dreamed of wearing it for. She sighed. She would take him back in half a second.

Callie felt her cheeks heating up. Tinsley was the only one she could still talk to about how hurt she was over the whole breakup. Instead of getting bored with it, Tinsley seemed to enjoy hearing about it. She almost seemed more pissed off at Jenny than Callie was.

Outside, the rain seemed to have slowed a bit. Callie yawned once again and decided to get her shit together and get on over to the gym. Exercise released endorphins, the only all-natural antidepressants. If she couldn't get her hands on any of her mom's Paxil, she might as well hop on a treadmill. From her overstuffed top dresser drawer (the one dedicated to her gym clothes, field hockey uniforms, and other fugly things), Callie pulled out a pair of stone-colored Adidas by Stella McCartney gym pants and stepped into them.

Hair band, hair band, Callie thought as she glanced over her dresser top. She was always losing them. Where the fuck did they all go? Guiltily she glanced at Jenny's dresser. It was almost as messy as hers. Maybe if Jenny hadn't turned out to be such a scheming, backstabbing boyfriend stealer, they might have become friends.

Without hesitation, Callie strode over to Jenny's dresser and reached for her Altoids tin full of hair bands. Her hand paused in midair, however, when she spotted the folded piece of notebook paper with the letter *J* on it. She touched the letter and it smeared. Charcoal.

Her heartbeat increased tenfold. She snatched up the piece of paper and examined Easy's familiar, eight-year-old penmanship – only he could make the letter *J* look practically illegible. She paused for a moment to debate the moral implications of reading someone else's private note before her curiosity got the best of her.

On the inside of the paper there were no words, just a drawing, in pencil. It was a caricature of a guy with a giant head of dark, unruly hair, wearing beat-up jeans with holes in the knees and a T-shirt with a peace sign on it. It was easy to guess who he was supposed to be. Easy. He was blowing a kiss.

Before she knew what she was doing, Callie had crumpled the paper into a tiny, tight ball. She stared at it in her palm for a second before stuffing it into the tiny zip-up

pocket in her track pants, meant only for a gym locker key. Her eyes raced around the room, searching for something to break or tear apart or throw against the wall or . . . She spotted the Altoids tin and grabbed a fist full of Jenny's hair bands and flung them one by one, slingshot style, around the room in every direction. Her incredible fury dissipated as each one went flying through the air and disappeared into the piles of crumpled-up designer clothes heaped on the floor.

Grabbing her gym bag, Callie stomped out the door and flew down the two flights of wooden stairs to Tinsley and Brett's room – she desperately needed someone, STAT!, to tell her how much prettier she was than munchkin, top-heavy Jenny and how Easy would regret their breakup for the rest of his life.

But as she sped around the corner, she skidded to a stop. Fuck. Right in front of Tinsley and Brett's door was Jenny, still dressed in slim-fitting ultra-dark jeans tucked into an adorable pair of flowered rain boots and a cute red modish vinyl raincoat. Her dark curly hair was plastered to her forehead, and her pale, perfect skin was slick with water. She might have looked like hell if her cheeks weren't flushed and a cute, self-satisfied smile wasn't perched on her ruby red lips. Her hand was holding a marker and poised to write something on the plastic wipe board hanging on Tinsley's door.

'Oh, hi!' Jenny looked up, startled. 'I, uh, was just leaving

a note for Brett.' Her cheeks colored even more, and Callie just stood there, silent.

Tinsley must have heard them because half a second later, before Callie even had sufficient time to ignore Jenny, the door opened. Tinsley stood there, in just a pair of black yoga pants and matching sports bra. She took in the scene objectively, first giving Callie a quick grin and then focusing her violet eyes on Jenny, who had taken a startled step back, still holding an open red marker in her hand. Tinsley cocked her head, as if trying to imagine what Jenny could be doing at her door.

Jenny practically melted beneath the silence and the withering gazes of the two older girls. 'Uh, see you at the gym, I guess. . . .' Her tiny voice trailed off as she backed away toward the stairs.

'Is that my marker?' Tinsley demanded coolly.

'Oh, sorry.' Jenny retraced her steps and handed the marker to Tinsley, pulling her hand back as if she was afraid of getting burned. 'Can you tell Brett . . . Never mind,' she corrected herself, suddenly remembering that Tinsley and Brett weren't exactly talking either. 'I better go.'

Callie and Tinsley stared at her as she disappeared around the corner. Then Tinsley placed her hand on Callie's long, slim arm. 'Don't worry. She'll get what's coming to her.' Tinsley's mischievous violet eyes sparkled. She was a schemer, and revenge was her favorite kind of

fun. It was obvious she already had a plan in the works to 'get' Jenny.

But Callie wasn't amused. The truth was she didn't want to get Jenny.

She just wanted Easy back where he belonged.



OwlNet Instant Message Inbox

To: BriannaMesserschmidt@elle.com
From: BrettMesserschmidt@waverly.edu
Date: Wednesday, October 2, 4:04 p.m.
Subject: Bliss

Bree,

Haven't heard from you in a while. I hope your boss isn't pulling a *Devil Wears Prada* on you. Things are going well here at good ole Waverly – though I'm planning on being kind of a traitorous Owl this weekend and cheering on St. Lucius's team at Jeremiah's homecoming – but I'll really just be cheering for him. He's been unbelievable lately, and I'm planning on rewarding him soon. . . . I'll keep you posted.

Don't worry, I'll still be your

Little Sis

;)