Unforgettable

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Extract

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A WAVERLY OWL KNOWS GOOD THINGS DON'T ALWAYS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT. REALLY, WHO HAS THE PATIENCE?

Jenny Humphrey stepped out of Jameson House after portraiture class and took in a breath of crisp fall air. Two tall, lanky senior guys in cargo pants and Waverly sweatshirts were tossing a Frisbee around on the lush green quad. They paused as she passed, and Jenny felt herself blushing. She walked away quickly, the fallen leaves crackling beneath her mustard-yellow suede ballet flats, wishing more than almost anything that she were headed down Amsterdam Avenue with her dad to get a couple of vanilla buttercream cupcakes from the Viennese bakery around the corner from their Upper West Side apartment. All she wanted was to get lost on the streets of Manhattan among millions of strangers, none of whom

would look at her and think, *There goes the girl Easy Walsh is about to dump.*

Jenny tugged at the hem of her short gray wool Anthroplogie miniskirt. She'd spent a little extra time getting ready today, anticipating seeing Easy for the first time since Saturday's disastrous party while the Dumbarton girls were all supposed to be on lockdown. She wore a pair of dark pin-striped Wolford tights that made her legs look longer than they were and a black RL button-down with three-quarter-length sleeves that made her chest look smaller than it was. But then Easy hadn't even bothered to show up for class. Jenny's heart had sunk when Mrs Silver closed the door to the studio and Easy's almost-black curly mop was nowhere to be found. What did that mean? Was he actually *avoiding* her?

She hadn't spoken with Easy since the terrible revelation – during a very public game of I Never on Saturday night, no less – that he had taken Callie Vernon, her unbearably tall, skinny, beautiful roommate who just happened to be his ex-girlfriend, out to an intimate dinner with his father. Not only had he *not* invited Jenny, his supposed girlfriend, he hadn't even *told* her about it, though apparently half the world already knew. And then the rest of the world found out after Tinsley 'Definition of Pure Evil' Carmichael broke the news to an entire roomful of happily partying Waverly Owls during the I Never game.

Easy had e-mailed Jenny on Saturday night after the party

disastrously disbanded, asking if she wanted to talk, but she'd written back and said she wasn't ready – she needed to figure out what the hell she was feeling first. But even having said that, she couldn't help hoping he would try to sneak in to see her with a handful of wildflowers or slip one of his goofy caricatures into her student mailbox. She didn't want to be one of those girls who said the exact opposite of what she meant, but still – it would have been nice to see Easy try.

Suddenly something sharp hit Jenny in the back of the neck, and she whirled around, expecting to see one of the Frisbee guys rushing toward her apologetically. But instead, a white paper airplane made of thick watercolor paper lay on the cobblestone path near her feet. She picked it up and unfolded it, her heart starting to thud in her chest, but nothing was written inside.

'Psst!' She glanced toward the cluster of birch trees to the left of Jameson House. There, nestled among them, a yellow leaf stuck behind his ear, was the boy she couldn't stop thinking about. Easy's enormous dark blue eyes looked nervous as he motioned her over.

Jenny shuffled slowly in his direction, a vision of Easy sitting across a candlelit dinner table from Callie and his father, chatting and laughing, flashing across her brain. She started to feel a little queasy and tried to replace the image with the memory of Sunday, when she'd hung out in the Dumbarton common room with Brett and Kara and even, surprisingly enough, *Callie.* They'd all complained

about boys – no specifics, just general, feel-good, boy-dissing bonding. *It wasn't that long ago they were swinging from trees, reaching for their bananas,* Callie had declared, and then they'd all made monkey noises the rest of the night. Now, seeing Easy among the leafy branches, Jenny had to suppress an *ooooh ooooh eeeeee eeeee!*

'Hey,' she said instead.

Easy's smile fell, as if he had been expecting a friendlier greeting, and Jenny felt herself softening. 'Why are you hiding in the bushes?' She raised an eyebrow.

He stepped out from the thatch of trees, glancing around. Easy was wearing a Waverly rugby shirt covered in grass stains, and his normally bright eyes were a little bloodshot, as if he hadn't been sleeping well. Well, it was only fair that he'd have trouble sleeping – she'd been tossing and turning for the past three nights, visions of tall, gorgeous Easy and tall, gorgeous Callie plaguing her brain.

'Didn't want Silver to see me.' He rubbed a hand over his eyes. 'I told her I was sick.'

'Then why are you here?' Jenny couldn't help but blurt out.

Easy's dark blue eyes clouded over. 'I . . . don't know. I guess I just wanted to talk to you.'

'Oh.' Jenny fumbled through her bag for her brandless white aviators that she'd bought on the street in SoHo before school had started. It was sunny out, but mostly she didn't want Easy to be able to see exactly what she was thinking.

Her brother, Dan, used to tell her that her face was about as hard to read as a stop sign. After rustling through her disorganized bag without any luck, she stopped searching, not wanting to accidentally unearth a tampon or something equally embarrassing. Instead, she shaded her eyes as she glanced up. 'Wanna walk me back to the dorm? I've got to get ready for practice.' He nodded slowly and they turned in the direction of Dumbarton.

They walked side by side down the cobblestone path, the shouts of students at sports practices in the distance ringing through the clean autumn air. They were both silent for a few minutes, and Jenny became painfully aware of the enormous space between them. Easy walked just out of her reach, and she had no idea what he was thinking. She wanted to turn and tackle him into a pile of leaves and kiss him, but she just . . . couldn't. She started to dig through her bag again, at last finding the sunglasses. She untangled them from the Owl pendant key chain she'd bought at the little shop in Rhinecliff that sold all things Waverly and slipped the aviators on her face.

A pack of girls in plaid miniskirts and kneesocks huddling on the library steps stared at them as they passed. All of Waverly had been buzzing with the revelations from the I Never game on Saturday night – there was Tinsley Carmichael, and Brett Messerschmidt's unmasked virginity to discuss, not to mention the revelation that Jeremiah Mortimer, Brett's longtime boyfriend, was suddenly *not* a

virgin, and neither was the pretty blonde St Lucius girl who had mysteriously followed him over to Dumbarton. And of course the fact that Easy Walsh had sneaked out on a date with Callie Vernon behind Jenny's back. The fact that Alison Quentin and Alan St Girard had hooked up at the party seemed totally banal in comparison and ranked relatively low on the Waverly gossip meter, even though hookups usually received top billing.

Easy shuffled his feet as they walked along. 'I just . . . wanted to apologize. Again.'

Jenny sighed. She *knew* he was sorry. But that didn't really mean anything. Sorry about what? That he'd taken Callie out to dinner instead of her? That he'd hurt and embarrassed her? That he'd completely messed things up between them?

Or was he sorry because he knew he was going to break her heart?

Jenny stopped walking. She'd overheard some girls in her English class talking about how they'd gone apple picking over the weekend, and Jenny couldn't help picturing herself there with Easy, his hands around her waist as she reached for the highest, most perfect red apple she could find and plucked it off the tree. She'd never actually been apple picking before, but it sounded so idyllic. She wondered if they'd ever have the chance to go now. Or if maybe he'd be taking Callie instead. She was so tall he wouldn't even have to help her reach the stupid apple.

'I guess I'm just . . . confused.' Jenny stared at the ground.

'Why did you want to go out to dinner with Callie?' she finally asked, wondering if Easy could have feelings for both of them at the same time. Maybe, but Jenny wasn't interested in being *one* of the people Easy loved. She wanted to be *the* one.

'It's not that I wanted to.' Easy turned to look at her, and she was glad she'd found her sunglasses. 'It just seemed easier that way.' He leaned down and grabbed a fistful of dry leaves off the ground, then opened his hand and let them float back down to the grass. She waited for him to say more, but he didn't.

It was not the answer she wanted – although she had no idea what answer would have made things all better. Maybe there *wasn't* one. Jenny stared at the brilliant orange oak trees behind Easy, avoiding his eyes. 'I don't really know what to say to that. I think I need some time to figure things out.' She bit her Stila lip-glossed lip. 'Maybe you need to do some figuring out too.'

She held her breath, waiting for him to say that he didn't need to figure anything out. That it was *her* he was crazy about, and no amount of thinking would change that. That he was sorry, and that he would be right here waiting for her when she got her own feelings in order. *Say it.*

But Easy just nodded his head slowly, his hands buried deep into the pockets of his faded, paint-splattered Levi's. "Kay,' he half-whispered.

Jenny straightened up. She let out the air she'd been

holding in, feeling suddenly . . . deflated. 'All right. I'll see you later, then.' Her voice came out much colder than she'd meant it to, so she tried to soften it. 'Don't miss art class on Friday. You know Mrs Silver loves you.'

Easy smiled. She could see his Adam's apple bobble in his throat. There was a patch of beard scruff beneath his chin that he had missed, and Jenny fought the urge to lean in and kiss him hard, right then and there. Maybe if she had, she could have made things go back to the way they were, before the stupid party, before the stupid dinner, before everything had gotten off track.

But he was already stepping backward, away from her, across the grass. 'Right.' He touched two fingers of his right hand to his forehead in a mock salute. 'I'll . . . uh . . . see you then.'

Jenny turned toward the dorms, refusing to look back. What had just happened? Was it . . . over? Tears sprang to her eyes, but she gulped quickly and tried to think happy thoughts: chocolate-sprinkled cupcakes from the Viennese bakery; Barneys sample sales; rainy days curled up inside with an old Nancy Drew mystery; the stately, ivy-covered brick buildings all around her.

But happy thoughts weren't enough to erase the uneasiness she felt. Easy was everything she'd always wanted in a boyfriend – she'd felt so impossibly lucky that he liked *her.* But maybe that was just it. Maybe it *was* impossible.



OwlNet Email Inbox

From: JeremiahMortimer@stlucius.edu
To: BrettMesserschmitt@waverly.edu
Date: Tuesday, October 8, 2:08 P.M.
Subject: Please don't delete

Babe, please answer your phone . . . or let me come see you? I need to explain – I need to talk to you, in person. I'm so, so sorry. What I did was – well, it was the biggest mistake of my life. And for a guy like me, you know that's saying something.

Kidding. But please. Call me.

This is *killing* me. Please.



OwlNet Instant Message Inbox

HeathFerro: Hey, sexy. Wanna come over and study for the bio test?

KaraWhalen: Uh . . . I'm not in bio.

HeathFerro: Oh. Well, how 'bout you come over and we find something else to do?

KaraWhalen: That's a gallant offer, but I've got a real study date planned. Some other time.

HeathFerro: You mean it?

KaraWhalen: No.