

**reckless**

*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 99<sup>th</sup> 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.