



**A WAVERLY OWL CAN ALWAYS SEE THE RAINBOW
AT THE END OF THE STORM.**

Jenny Humphrey stepped confidently through the massive puddles in the long pebbled drive leading away from the Waverly Academy campus, water sloshing against her sturdy, three-seasons-ago hunter green J.Crew wellies. It had been raining nearly nonstop for the past few weeks, and Waverly's sprawling green lawns were strewn with brightly colored oak leaves that glistened with rain, forming a brilliant mosaic across the expansive grounds.

'Jenny!'

Jenny glanced to her left. A group of three girls in maroon nylon short shorts over black leggings and matching maroon Waverly waterproof windbreakers were jogging in her direction, led by Celine Colista, the senior co-captain of

the field hockey team. She was, as always, unerringly glamorous looking, her black hair pulled into a sleek bun. The girls paused in front of Jenny, jogging in place, their white sneakers splattered with mud.

‘What’s up? Where’re you rushing off to?’ Celine pushed a wet strand of black hair behind her ear and smiled broadly at Jenny.

Jenny eyed the three girls and wondered if she, too, should start running regularly to keep in shape now that the field hockey season was almost over. Ugh. ‘Town.’ Jenny tilted her head in the direction of Rhinecliff’s downtown, and a fat raindrop slid off the tip of her freckled, slightly upturned nose. ‘Of course I’ve waited till the last minute to think about a costume.’ Waverly’s annual Halloween ball was tomorrow night, and over the past few days, costume discussions had reached a fever pitch.

Emmy Rosenblum, the willowy girl to Celine’s right, leaned forward to stretch out a calf muscle, her dark, curly hair sliding into her face. ‘I’m sure you can find something cool at Next-to-New.’ The secondhand store was exactly where Jenny was heading. Not that she had too many choices in the two square blocks of Rhinecliff. Her other options were spending an obscene amount of money on a designer dress at Pimpernel’s, or wearing a plastic Transformers costume from Rite Aid. When Emmy stood up, her face was flushed bright red, though her hair managed to slide back into place perfectly.

‘Yeah, you’re so cute and little – you could probably find

some kind of fairy getup or something,' Celine offered, eyeing Jenny up and down.

'Tinkerbell, maybe?' The third girl, a tall redhead Jenny didn't recognize, put her hands on her hips as she leaned backward to stretch a hamstring.

'That's a good idea.' Jenny shifted the strap of her Le Sportsac messenger bag, which was uncomfortably crushing her large chest, and tugged at the hem of her short black H&M-but-looks-like-Michael-Kors raincoat. 'But I don't think pixies are supposed to, you know, have boobs like this?'

Celine, Emmy, and the girl Jenny didn't know burst into laughter before starting off in the other direction. 'Good luck with the costume. And you should totally come running with us sometime,' Celine offered, over her shoulder. 'It's a bitch, but still kind of fun.'

'Thanks for the invite,' Jenny called as she watched their long legs dashing across campus. She'd be about eight miles behind, but still – it was nice to be invited.

Jenny continued down the soggy drive. It was really hard to believe that almost exactly two weeks ago, she had been trudging down this very same path, duffel bag stuffed haphazardly with whatever contents of her dorm room hadn't fit into the boxes ready to be shipped back to her apartment in New York. Now, everything was different – epitomized by the fact that Celine Colista wanted Jenny to come running with her.

All it had required, she thought wryly, wiping the rain

off her face with her already wet hand, was confessing to a crime she hadn't committed – and being willing to get expelled for it. She wasn't sure exactly why she'd confessed to starting the fire that had burned down the Miller farm. But in the pressure of the moment, back in Dean Marymount's office full of the Usual Suspects, it had felt like everyone – Tinsley and Callie, who were out to get her, of course, but really, more than that – had wanted her to get expelled. When Jenny's 'confession' had come spilling out of her lips, it had seemed to her, at that moment, that the last place on earth she belonged was Waverly Academy, home of gorgeous trust-fund babies and effortlessly cool people who hated her.

But now – things had changed. Jenny knew she certainly looked like the exact same person she was two weeks ago – short, but in pretty decent shape from field hockey drills, and a little too busty for her own taste – and deep down she *was* the same. But everyone around her seemed to see her in a different light, like she was some kind of demigod for escaping expulsion. She felt kind of like one of those people at death's door, who travel down a long hallway toward 'the light' only to get pushed back at the last second into their life.

And it was an even better life than it had been before.

She turned onto the main street of Rhinecliff, sidestepping a nanny hurriedly pushing an overloaded stroller down the sidewalk. As she jumped out of the way, she caught the eye of a cute, dark-haired boy sitting on a stool in the win-

dow of Coffee-Roasters. He gave her a curious half-grin as he took a sip from his oversize coffee mug, like he knew a secret about her.

Jenny's heart thumped as she continued down the sidewalk. Was that *him*? Could he have been her secret admirer? For the past few weeks, all she'd really been able to think about was the fact that *someone* had bribed Mrs. Miller to tell Dean Marymount that the fire had most definitely not been started by one of the students, but by one of her *cows*. Mrs. Miller had been spotted at the Rhinecliff bank that same day, chatting about her extravagant plans to renovate the farm and build a brand-new guesthouse where the barn had been. And everyone knew no insurance settlement could have come that quickly.

So who on earth was it who wanted to make sure Jenny stayed at Waverly so badly? She *had* to know, and even though it was silly, she couldn't help sitting around with Brett, giggling and joking about who her 'secret savior' could possibly be.

As she wandered down the streets of Rhinecliff, she was suddenly reminded of a trip here just a few weeks ago, window-shopping with Julian. A brief flash of – what? Something between sadness and regret passed over her. She'd tried not to think about him lately, and she'd been so busy it had actually worked. It just seemed like a million years ago that they'd been . . . whatever it was they were. If they'd been anything at all. But before she could think any more about it, she shoved all thoughts of Julian straight out of

her mind. She wanted to be one hundred percent focused on the job at hand – finding a cute Halloween costume that wouldn't break the bank or make her look like a midget with stripper boobs.

A long string of chimes jangled loudly as Jenny pushed open the door of Next-to-New. A young woman in a white tank top and a red bandana tied around her hair looked up from the beat-up paperback she was reading behind the counter and nodded indifferently at Jenny. Jenny wiped her rubber boots on the scraggly brown doormat, trying to get every last drop of water off. The store was the exact opposite of Pimpernel's, the chichi boutique whose clothes were hung on the racks according to color, with only one of each dress, usually a size 0. Next-to-New looked like it had been stuffed with a thousand attics' worth of clothing. It reminded Jenny of wandering the aisles of the Greenwich Village street fairs, which hid all kinds of bargain treasures – and also tons of junk.

Jenny spotted a bright yellow–feathered chicken costume hanging from the ceiling, complete with orange strap-on beak. Great. With her luck, she'd probably end up wearing that to her first big Waverly gala. What would her secret admirer think of *that*? *Cluck, cluck*. She giggled to herself.

Against the back wall were racks and racks chock-full of long, vintage-looking dresses, worn once by Waverly Owls before being abandoned for the next great thing. Jenny made a beeline for them. She ran her hands over the silky, delicate fabrics, expertly twisting the tags to scan the size. A pale

pink flapper dress with a plunging neckline caught her eye and she gently extracted it, holding it against her body and wondering if it would make her boobs look indecent.

‘That’s hot,’ Rifat Jones squealed as she stepped out of the tiny dressing room in a pair of brown suede bell-bottoms and a sparkly gold halter top that was straight out of Studio 54. ‘Is it for the party?’

Jenny stared down at the pink dress. It looked like something a cotton candy machine had spat out. ‘I think it’s a little too . . . bright for me.’ She squeezed it back onto the rack and continued to page through the dresses.

‘I’m going for the disco queen look.’ Rifat touched her slim hips and looked down at the strip of flat stomach that the halter top exposed. ‘But it’s not like I’m out to win or anything.’

‘Win what?’ Thumbing through the rack, Jenny spotted a one-shouldered off-white dress, one of those dresses that looked so perfect on a hanger, it was destined to look terrible when you tried it on. Jenny had a sudden flash of herself dressed as Cleopatra – she’d actually been ‘cast’ as Cleopatra when Miss Rose had asked all her students to read parts in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. (All the other female parts were maids or pushy wives while she got to be the sexpot – not bad.) The dress was kind of togalike, and she could easily imagine the Egyptian queen dressing up in the latest styles from Rome. Jenny scooted into the dressing room next to Rifat’s, hooking the hanger over the door and kicking her damp LeSportsac to the corner.

‘Best costume.’ Rifat’s voice drifted over the red fabric divider as Jenny quickly stripped off her raincoat and flung her clothes onto the stool. She held her breath, hoping that her run of good luck would continue and the dress would fit perfectly. ‘They do it at the end of the Halloween party every year. It’s a pretty big deal – the winner gets a crown and everything.’

‘Funny.’ Jenny stepped through the dress with her bare feet, and she slid her right arm through the armhole, gingerly pulling it up. She jiggled the zipper along the side a little, trying not to snag the fabric, clasping it in place at her armpit with the tiny hook. There was no mirror inside the dressing room, so she drew back the fabric curtain and stepped into the store.

Rifat had changed back into dark jeans and a thick marbled wool turtleneck. She stared at Jenny. ‘Shit, Jenny.’

‘What a hottie!’ Alison Quentin appeared out of nowhere, arms loaded with swiny prom-type dresses as she moved toward the dressing rooms. ‘You look like a movie star.’

Jenny was too busy examining her image in the gold-rimmed three-way mirror to register Rifat’s and Alison’s words. The dress fit like a dream. A thin braid of gold swept right beneath Jenny’s breasts, lifting them slightly. Although the neckline was modest, the dress swept down at the sides and was almost completely backless. Jenny peered over her shoulder at her reflection, trying to decide if she was the kind of girl who could wear a backless dress. She put a hand on her hip and twirled around. She had to admit

that her bare shoulder looked, even with her pale, slightly freckled skin, pretty sexy. 'Do you think I could do a kind of Egyptian-Cleopatra thing?'

'Oh, totally,' Rifat gushed. 'You know, I've got this gold cobra arm bracelet that would look awesome with that.'

'Really?' Jenny grinned and twisted her hair up off her neck, letting the curly tendrils just skim her bare shoulder. It was almost too easy. After all the stress and anxiety she'd been through since setting foot on campus, it felt as though the boarding school gods had finally smiled on her.

'You're going to give Tinsley a run for her money.'

She turned abruptly back to Rifat. 'What do you mean?' Just hearing the name cast a pall over her glowing mood. Over the last two weeks, the only downer had been the thought that Tinsley Carmichael hated her so much she would actually scheme to get her kicked out of Waverly. The thought that Julian had hooked up with Tinsley didn't help. Nor did the fact that Callie, Jenny's own roommate, had been in on the scheme. Last week, after *Advanced Portraiture*, Easy Walsh had pulled her aside and told her, gently, that he'd found out Callie had worked with Tinsley to set Jenny up and make her appear guilty of starting the fire. It was one thing to know that Tinsley Carmichael hated her – but even after all their ups and downs, Jenny was crushed to know that Callie had turned against her so completely.

Alison pulled back the curtain to the dressing room Rifat had left and flung her dresses inside. She unwrapped a thin flowered scarf from around her neck. 'Tinsley won the

costume competition last year – and the year before, too. And freshmen *never* win.’

Rifat nodded. ‘It’s pretty much a popularity contest. She’s always been kind of a shoo-in.’

Alison grinned and snapped her flowered scarf so that it hit Jenny in the waist. ‘Until now.’

Jenny gave herself one last, long look in the mirror. Normally, she would have suspected it of being a skinny mirror, that she couldn’t possibly look as good in real life as she did in its image. But she felt like she could finally tell her ever-present neuroses to shut up. She looked good. She felt good.

And it would feel even better to put Tinsley Carmichael in her place.



- AlisonQuentin:** Going with gangsta or Nixon?
- AlanStGirard:** Tough call. Who would U get naked w?
- AlisonQuentin:** Nixon's got the power thing going on. . . .
- AlanStGirard:** Then call me Mr. President.
- AlisonQuentin:** Just saw J's costume – totally hot.
- AlanStGirard:** Poor Julian – he really fucked that up!
- AlisonQuentin:** Did U hear what he did? Jenny won't talk.
- AlanStGirard:** Nah, he just plays dumb.
- AlisonQuentin:** Maybe that was the problem.



JennyHumphrey: I'm thinking Cleopatra. Too much?

BrettMesserschmitt: Flaunt it, babe. Your secret admirer will take one look at you and finally come out of hiding!

JennyHumphrey: We can always hope. . . .