



**A WAVERLY OWL TAKES HER TUTORING DUTIES  
SERIOUSLY – REGARDLESS OF HOW SERIOUSLY  
HER TUTEE DOES.**

**I**t was unnaturally quiet in the main reading room in Sawyer Library on the Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving. Brett Messerschmidt rapped the edge of her stack of index cards against the grooved oak of the giant study table where she was parked. Latin texts and notebooks crammed with her elegant, backward-leaning penmanship were sprawled out in front of her, as if her backpack had exploded. Only a handful of students remained in the library, some with overstuffed duffels at their feet, waiting for their parents' Lexus SUVs to pull up and tote them off for a weekend of organic free-range turkey and HDTV.

Ever since Brett had come to Waverly Academy, she'd dreaded going back home to her parents' gaudy McMansion in Rumson, New Jersey, having decided that just about

every aspect of suburban life in the Garden State was completely gauche. Maybe it was the nightmare she'd made of her personal life this past semester, but she could hardly bear to think about her dad's straight-from-the-can cranberry sauce, and how her mom always insisted on tackling the crowded Mall at Short Hills on Black Friday. The thought of sitting on a bench in the mall next to her mom, eating a buttery hot pretzel from Auntie Anne's, even with bags and bags of clothes from Betsey Johnson and Guess surrounding them, made Brett feel kind of gross.

The creak of the wooden chair opposite her brought her back to the present. Leaning precariously against the magazine shelf was a tall, dark-haired boy with an expression on his face that hovered between boredom and amusement. Brett narrowed her almond-shaped green eyes at him, trying to look at him objectively, as if she hadn't spent the past four weeks trying to make him memorize some Cicero – as if he wasn't a giant pain in her ass.

'*Sebastian.*' Brett hooked an escaped lock of silky red hair behind her ear and tried to sound stern. She'd booked an appointment with her stylist on Saturday, grateful for the impending Thanksgiving weekend and the chance to go somewhere besides the Supercuts at the Rhinecliff Mall – not that anyone at Waverly actually went there. 'Focus, please.'

'You really want me to pay attention?' A ray of weak autumn sunlight landed on Sebastian's jawline, reminding Brett of how much this time of year depressed her. When

you got out of your last class, it was already dark out. 'Maybe next time you could wear something sexier instead of, I don't know, looking like Mrs. Birdsall.' Mrs. Birdsall was the head librarian, whose uniform consisted of a black turtle-neck and a long corduroy skirt, even in summer.

Brett glared at him. 'I'm your tutor, sleazebag, not your Pussycat Doll.' She tried not to let the comment bother her, coming from someone who judged how hot a girl was by how much skin she showed. She knew she looked attractive in her snug-fitting American Apparel black turtleneck and straight-leg black Calvin Klein jeans, a narrow red belt cinching her small waist. It was a look she'd planned out carefully, in case she ran into any college guys from Williams or Bard later on the Metro-North train down to Grand Central.

'You're not exactly focusing either,' Sebastian grunted, touching his fingers to his thick dark hair, as if to make sure he'd used enough gel that morning. He had. 'So what. Is. The. Big. Deal?' He emphasized his words by clanking the feet of his chair to the floor and staring straight at Brett. His long-sleeved white shirt looked like someone had stepped on it, the outline of his white wife-beater clearly visible underneath.

'The big deal,' Brett sighed, wishing for the hundredth time that she could pull out a razor and shear off his shiny hair, 'is that you're probably *not* going to graduate. That'll make a nice Christmas present for Mom and Dad, eh?'

'Let's not talk about my parents,' he said, sitting up

straight in his chair. His dark, almost black eyes stared back at Brett with arrogance. 'I'm going to graduate, so don't get your panties in a bunch.'

Brett snorted. 'What makes you think so?' She eyed him. The smell of Drakkar Noir permeated their immediate area and she was just thankful that the library had all but emptied. Mrs. Birdsall had already locked the doors to the upper floors – apparently afraid that some horny Owls would try to hole up in the library over the long weekend, desecrating the sacred study spaces.

'Because . . .' Sebastian grinned, leaning forward, revealing a small chip in his bottom incisor that always surprised Brett. Why hadn't he ever gotten it fixed? 'I've got you.'

Brett felt a surge of electricity – part annoyance, part something else – flow through her body. '*Look*. I'm not doing this for my own personal satisfaction.'

'I know something about personal satisfaction, if you're interested.'

He was just lucky there was no one around, or she'd have had to reach across their open Latin books and slap him. Hard.

'*I've got you, babe,*' he began singing. He snapped his fingers as he hummed the rest of the song.

Brett forced herself to refrain from smiling at his lame joke. The fact was, he wasn't taking their tutoring sessions seriously enough, and whether or not he wanted to acknowledge it, he was in real danger of failing out of Waverly. She tapped her cranberry-colored nails (Madame Butterfly

by Nars) against the white cover of her closed Mac iBook. They still hadn't gotten to half of the things she'd wanted to cover today.

Sebastian rubbed his hand over his face, looking as if he were as exasperated with Brett as she was with him. 'Look, why don't we get out of here? Grab a cup of coffee or something, and you can tell me the real reason you act like you have a stick up your ass all the time.'

Brett pressed her eyes closed, thinking of the million other places she'd rather be than wasting her time in the library with Sebastian. Unfortunately, the one she'd been trying not to think about was the easiest one to imagine – cuddled next to Jeremiah Mortimer, her on-again-off-again boyfriend, in front of a roaring fire in his family's Colorado ski lodge, sipping homemade hot chocolate out of oversize ceramic cups. Or maybe, in between rounds of Pictionary, listening to his perfectly tasteful New England blue-blood parents tell the story of how they met. The images mocked her, painful reminders of what she could have had if she'd just been a little smarter.

Because, unfortunately, thanks to her little experimental fling with Kara Whalen while she and Jeremiah had been on a temporary break, and her subsequent lying about it, they were now *permanently* off.

Sebastian's phone vibrated against the wooden table. He snatched it up and frowned at the screen. He answered in a low whisper, 'Dude, I thought I told you never to call me here.'

Brett crossed her arms across her chest and stared at the magazines on the shelf behind Sebastian. She was tempted to snatch a copy of the *The New Yorker* to read on the train ride home, but she'd already picked up a *People* magazine at the drugstore in town, and right now the idea of reading about other people's problems was far more appealing. So much for impressing the college boys.

Before she could slap the table to remind Sebastian that they were studying, and that cell phones on campus – especially in the library – were strictly forbidden, her own phone vibrated in her quilted black Zac Posen tote with a new text message. She snatched it out and was surprised to see the name *Bree* light up under the tiny envelope. She'd be seeing her sister in a matter of hours – she couldn't wait to change into her hot pink Juicy Couture sweats and veg out in front of the big-screen TV in their media room with Bree. And maybe vent about Jeremiah and how much her life sucked now.

*Guess who's coming to dinner?* the text read. Brett texted back, *Who?* even though she suspected the answer before it popped up on the tiny screen: *Willy*. Brianna could talk of little else but the great Willy Cooper the Third since they'd met a few months ago while sitting at adjacent tables at the Waverly Inn. At first, Brett had been curious to meet him, but the more Bree told her about him, the more he sounded like a tool. He was a Yale grad, a Wharton MBA, working on Wall Street for one of the biggest investment banks, and hadn't taken a vacation in the three years he'd

been there. Except, apparently, to spend Thanksgiving with the Messerschmidts. Brett hoped he didn't mind sitting on the couch and watching MTV marathons all day.

The phone chimed again. *And his parents.* Brett stared at the three words, her stomach dropping to the floor. Guess she'd *really* be sharing Bree this weekend. She wanted to text back, *All the way from Greenwich??* but resisted. Instead, she shut her phone off, eyeing Sebastian, who was still laughing loudly into his phone, oblivious of the fact that Mrs. Birdsall was shooting him daggers from the front desk. Brett tapped an invisible watch on her wrist and bugged her eyes at him. He held up his finger and nodded.

'Later, man.' He closed the phone, dropping it into the pocket of the backpack at his feet. 'Sorry. It was important.'

'Yeah, it sounded important,' she said rudely, tearing a list of vocabulary words from her spiral notebook and pushing it over to Sebastian.

'Hey, you were on your phone, too,' he chirped angrily, snatching the paper away.

'Yeah, *waiting* for you to get off yours.' Brett was grateful to be snapping at Sebastian, because she could do it on autopilot. It kept the tears of frustration from springing to her eyes. Were strangers *really* going to be invading her house for Thanksgiving? If there was ever a year where she needed some peaceful time to rejuvenate herself, this was it. Now she'd have to hole up in her room with some DVDs if she was going to get any peace. She envisioned herself cross-legged on her down comforter, the snow blanketing

New Jersey while she ate her Thanksgiving dinner off a plate in her lap, forking a cold piece of greasy turkey and smearing it through her mother's cheddar mashed potatoes, while the discussion of the stock market wafted up to her from the dining room.

Mrs. Birdsall switched off a bank of fluorescent lights and half the library went dark. Brett glanced up at the clock on the wall and jumped out of her chair. '*Shit*,' she muttered, frantically stuffing her notebooks into her tote and throwing on her short black DKNY coat. How had it gotten to be so late? The whole save-Sebastian project was doomed from the start, so why keep up the charade of even trying? 'I'm going to be late for my train. You're on your own.'

'Happy Thanksgiving, huh?' he called out after her. Brett wrapped her yellow plaid L.A.M.B. scarf around her neck and pulled on her black leather gloves. She pushed open the double doors to the library and stepped out into the darkening, snow-filled afternoon, too absorbed in nightmarish visions of the Coopers of Greenwich to say goodbye.



OwlNet

Instant Message Inbox

**RyanReynolds:** Did I just see you step into an effing Fiat? Wtf?

**BennyCunningham:** Guess Daddy's having a midlife crisis. Did you catch the toupee?

**RyanReynolds:** Spotted that rug from across the common! U know what comes next: a new Mommy Dearest.

**BennyCunningham:** Nah, they want what's best for the kids. Besides, they have an Understanding.

**RyanReynolds:** Meaning everyone's bringing a date to T-day?

**BennyCunningham:** U got it.

**RyanReynolds:** Can I come?

**BennyCunningham:** You couldn't handle us. Ta-ta!



OwlNet

Instant Message Inbox

**LonBaruzza:** Anyone got a wishbone? I have a fucking fabulous wish.

**AlanStGirard:** Whassat?

**LonBaruzza:** At the train station now, watching Tinsley, Callie, and Jenny huddle together in the cold. Wishing they were naked.

**AlanStGirard:** That'd be a sight. Where's Brett? Need a little redhead mixed in to have it all.

**LonBaruzza:** My fav thing about those chicks is that any sec a catfight could break out . . .

**AlanStGirard:** Take a pic if it happens, bro. Happy vacation!!