

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Jennifer Weiner

a short story

GOLDEN HILLS

An artistic illustration of two women walking away from the viewer on a path through a field of tall grass. The woman on the left has dark hair and is wearing a light blue shirt and a purple skirt. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a light blue dress. The background features rolling hills in shades of green and yellow, with a blue sky above. The overall style is painterly and vibrant.

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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The news broke—on social media, of course—on Friday afternoon, ten days before the election.

Ida Berkowitz, just a few weeks past her thirty-sixth birthday, “the world’s youngest Ida,” as her social-media director liked to call her, was in the back seat of her Town Car after a twelve-hour day, finally on her way home. She had her personal phone in her hand, and she’d placed her work phone on the space between the seats and was watching it vibrate nonstop with a barrage of incoming texts, mentally betting herself that it would shimmy right off the seat and onto the floor before the next red light, when she heard her campaign director, Dani Vincent, make a faint alarmed noise from the seat beside her.

Ida looked sideways. Dani was holding her phone up to her face, her glasses perched on top of her head, peering at its screen, with the line between her eyebrows deepening as she frowned. “Who is Marissa Schuyler?” she asked.

For a brief, lovely instant, Ida truly didn’t know. But as soon as her mind attached an identity and a story to the name, as soon as that sad piece of her personal history landed in her memory, she felt weightless, breathless, like her spirit had been evicted from her body and was floating somewhere near the roof of the car, looking down at her sadly.

“Marissa Schuyler,” she said, tasting the syllables of the name.

Dani waited. Ida adjusted her seat belt. She cleared her throat and tried to think, to prepare an answer that might properly encompass the story of Marissa. She settled on the kind of carefully worded statement she’d perfected during her six years in politics, one that sounded substantive while actually saying as little as possible. “If it’s the person I’m thinking of, we went to summer camp together.”

“At that place?” Dani asked. Dani probably knew the details of Ida’s biography just as well as Ida herself did by then.

“Yes. That place. Why?”

“*Politico* says she’s giving a press conference at noon tomorrow with John Coogan—and that it’s about you.”

Ida felt unease prickle the back of her neck at the name of the infamous

right-wing podcaster. During her first political campaign for the House, she'd been eight points up in the polls when Coogan, then a blogger, posted the revelation that when Ida was sixteen, she'd attended a weight-loss camp in upstate New York called Camp Golden Hills. She didn't know where Coogan had dug up the unflattering pictures of Ida in too-short gym shorts and a borrowed tank top, shoulders rounded and hunched in an effort to disguise her breasts. His attempt to scuttle her campaign had backfired so badly that Ida ended up almost feeling sorry for Coogan, who'd been accused of body-shaming, misogyny, and, worst of all, political miscalculation. Nine days after that botched stunt, Ida Berkowitz had been elected in a landslide. Republicans, both nationally and in New York, blamed Coogan for their loss of a winnable seat. She wasn't surprised to learn that he still had it out for her.

"Do you have any idea what this could be about?" Dani asked.

Ida looked at her. Dani was in her fifties, a pale, intense woman who wore her silvery hair scraped back in a ballet bun. She liked to say that she'd been running campaigns almost as long as Ida had been alive. Ida couldn't afford her, but Dani had come on board at a discount. *I believe in you*, she'd said at the time. *I believe in what you stand for. And I believe that you believe it.* Ida looked at Dani's expectant face and wondered how long that would still be true once she came clean about Marissa and the events of the summer they'd spent together.

"I have no idea what this could be about," Ida said. Which was not precisely true. "Marissa and I went to camp together, but I haven't seen her since I was sixteen." Ida found that she could still picture, in high-definition detail, the look of shock and betrayal on Marissa's face. *I thought you were my friend*, Marissa had said.

"So you don't have any idea why Marissa Schuyler is giving a press conference with John Coogan."

Ida shook her head slightly.

Dani sighed. "And here I thought we were going to make it to November unscathed."

Ida didn't respond. *October surprise* was the term for a late-breaking pre-Election Day revelation that could torpedo a campaign. James Comey announcing that the FBI was looking into Hillary's emails; the *Access Hollywood* tapes letting all the world hear Donald Trump's assertion that he could grab women anywhere he pleased; the news about George W. Bush's

drunk-driving arrest days before the 2000 election—all October surprises. It was not lost on Ida that of those three cases, the men had gone on to win their elections, and the woman had lost.

Dani was still looking at her expectantly. Ida exhaled. “There was a boy,” she said.

“A boy?” Dani repeated, brow furrowing. “So this is some kind of summer-camp teenage drama?”

“It was a little more than that,” Ida said. She closed her eyes. An hour ago, the pundits were calling her a sure thing. She was twelve points ahead of her competitor, Ryan Bragg, the son of David Bragg, a weak-chinned backbencher who’d held the seat for thirty-six years and whose only contribution of significance had been attaching a rider to a budget bill that had renamed the Triborough Bridge. The pundits and the voters had, so far, been as unimpressed with Bragg Junior as they’d been with Bragg Senior, especially because Ryan Bragg had behaved like the seat was something his father could gift him, like his trust fund or his legacy admission to Princeton. Ida had been counting on Junior’s all-around unimpressiveness, combined with his off-putting arrogance and the current scorn for so-called nepo babies to ensure her victory. Only now . . .

Now the chattering classes were probably chattering about whether someone had, at last, found a chink in Ida’s armor, a skeleton in her closet, a secret that could be used to take a formerly bulletproof candidate down.

Ida didn’t want to talk to Dani. She didn’t want to be in the car. She wanted to go home. She wanted to put on her pink bathrobe and eat canned creamed corn on toast, her beloved secret snack. She wanted to get out of what her stylist called a “base layer” and what her nana would have called a girdle. She wanted Frankie to rub her shoulders and tell her that she was different, that she’d changed, that she wasn’t the girl she’d been at sixteen—an envious, covetous girl who’d done bad things and hurt people. She wanted to pull the covers up over her head and watch trashy dating shows. She wanted not to have to think about that long-ago summer, or anything at all.

“Ida?” Dani’s voice was as gentle as Ida had ever heard it. “If this is something we need to get out in front of, you need to tell me. We’ll find a way to control the narrative. But I need to know what happened. Do you understand?”

Ida nodded without opening her eyes. She’d hoped that she had put that summer behind her. Of course, she’d never imagined she’d be here, a three-

term representative running for the Senate. She'd grown up the daughter of a single mother clinging to the middle class, and she'd never thought that her life would unfold the way it had, one blessing—one miracle—after another. Like the Hanukkah oil, whenever she thought there wouldn't be enough, somehow, magically, there had been.

When she first decided to run for office, Ida had been a teacher, moonlighting as a waitress to pay the bills. She'd heard how bad the job was, but it wasn't until she was working, taking home that shamefully tiny paycheck and trying to teach thirty-four first graders from outdated textbooks in a classroom where, half the time, the lights didn't work and where, it turned out, there was asbestos in the walls—a fact revealed only after a magnet school with a majority-white student body and a very involved parents' group started sharing their facility—that she started to get angry. Why did the politicians who doled out the money pay teachers, the majority of whom were women, like their work didn't matter? Why did they treat the kids as disposable, expendable, unworthy of updated facilities or technology or even just a building that wouldn't give them cancer?

Ida's mentor teacher had given her a pep talk. Ida's union rep had given her forms to fill out. Ida's mother had just sighed.

And so, almost on a whim, Ida had decided to run for office. "I'm not a politician. I'm a teacher," she'd said in her very first speech. "But I believe that children matter, and that we can't just write off an entire generation for the sin of having parents who can't afford private schools. I believe that you believe it, too. And I promise I'll always tell you the truth."

She'd been a long shot, running in a heavily Republican district encompassing the wealthiest enclaves of the Upper East Side, and barely thirty years old. But her life story—the only child of a widowed mother who'd spent her career at Legal Aid—had resonated with voters, along with her youth, her unblemished-slash-nonexistent record, her enthusiasm, her promise of transparency and honesty, and her message of women helping women. She was, voters said, a breath of fresh air, especially in comparison to a cynical incumbent who treated the seat like a sinecure and didn't even bother to campaign. Ida was viewed as authentic, relatable. Women voters saw her as a feminist—"but not the scary kind," her pollster was quick to assure her. "More like an ally. A friend who'd have their backs."

Ida had spent nine months giving speeches, raising money, introducing herself to voters at diners and parks and subway stops. At every point when

things seemed hopeless and the coffers were empty, someone—no, not just *someone*, some *woman*—had come through with exactly what she needed. There'd been money or a hotel room or a plane ticket, a four-figure donation, an introduction to a designer who wanted to gift Ida clothes to wear at her public appearances, a rich alumna with a mansion in San Francisco offering to host a fundraiser, a friend of a friend with a beach house on the Cape offering the same.

Ida had worked hard, and her campaign had unexpectedly caught fire. Hundreds of teenagers and twentysomethings had given up their nights and weekends to volunteer; thousands had sent small donations. Popular musicians had played at her house parties and campaign events. A social-media strategist barely out of her teens had gotten Ida set up on Twitter and Instagram, where her cheeky quips, goofy videos, and not-infrequent bloopers were quoted and replayed on late-night talk shows. She'd gone viral more than once, including the time she'd urged Hugh Hewitt to build a bridge and get over himself, and the time she'd worn an ill-advised pair of platform heels and wiped out climbing to the podium at the New York State Fair.

A prominent feminist website had profiled her. A fashion magazine had featured her in a four-page spread, with five other young female politicians, all members of what the magazine called "Generation Next." Ida had worried about being the only plus-size woman in the group, fretting that she wouldn't have the clothing options the other women would enjoy, or that the stylist wouldn't know what to do with her curls, but the pictures had been gorgeous. Even better: the magazine had let Ida keep the dress she'd worn for the shoot. She'd worn it on Election Day and that night, when, with cameras all around, her opponent called to concede and Ida stood in front of an ecstatic crowd in a rented ballroom on the Upper East Side to make her victory speech. "I stand on the shoulders of giants, the end of the line made up of a hundred different women who helped me in a hundred different ways. When women lift each other up, when we reach out our hands to each other, when we honor the ones who came before us and hold the door open for the ones who will follow, there is nothing we can't do."

"*Girl power!*" screamed a pink-haired teenager in the front row . . . and soon the rest of the crowd took up the chant. It was the headline of the *New York Post* story that ran the next morning. It had been Ida's slogan ever since.

After six years in the House of Representatives, Ida had decided to run for the Senate. She'd won her primary easily, and the polls and conventional

wisdom agreed that Ida would also win the general. Already, there were people wondering if she'd serve all six years or if she'd already set her sights elsewhere. "Ida Berkowitz Grabs Back," the *New York Times* headline had read—a play on Trump's infamous "Grab 'em by the pussy" quote—with a picture of Ida in three-quarter profile, wearing a smartly cut blue blazer and a determined look. These days, the place many people believed Ida was going was the White House.

Ida had been, she could acknowledge, abundantly blessed, exceptionally lucky. But as her mother loved to remind her, nothing good was ever free. The bill always came due.

"We'll talk later," Ida said to Dani as the Town Car glided up to the portico of her building and a doorman—Stanley, her favorite—hurried out with an enormous black umbrella.

"Ida . . ." Dani put her hand on Ida's forearm. Dani, who hardly ever touched her. Ida looked down at the other woman's pale hand, the blue veins that bulged on its back, the gold wedding band on her third finger. "You've got the drinks thing with the auto workers' union at eight, and the Instagram Live at ten, and in between, we were hoping you'd get on the phone with some of the donors."

Ida had never been unwilling to put in the work, no matter how unpleasant. At least, she never had until that night. "Cancel them," she said. "Please."

Dani stared at her. "Seriously?"

Ida nodded, and slid along the seat, then out of the car, with her head bent and her chin tucked into her chest.

"I gotcha, I gotcha," Stanley said, his voice low and comforting, using the umbrella to hide her face. Ida kept her head down through the two sets of glass doors, then through the lobby, until she was finally in the elevator, alone.

The year after they'd gotten married, Ida and Frankie had bought a two-bedroom apartment in a doorman building. Their home was bright and airy, with high ceilings, built-in bookshelves, and the art that they'd collected on their travels hung on the gallery-white walls. The kitchen was small but smartly laid out and well equipped. The bedroom they shared was big enough for a king-size bed, and the en suite bathroom had a steam shower and hers-and-hers sinks. A second, smaller bedroom was presently a guest-room-slash-home-office, but eventually, the plan was to make it a nursery. Frankie and

Ida called it their Someday Room.

Ida walked through the front door and proceeded directly to the bathroom, where she shucked off her clothes, wriggled out of the dread base layer, and stood under the shower until the hot water was gone. She wrapped her hair in a towel, wrapped herself in her pink bathrobe, and finally, when she couldn't put it off any longer, she made herself look at her phone. Seven missed calls from Dani. Ida sighed, and two minutes later, when Dani called again, Ida picked up.

Her campaign manager never indulged in small talk, and now was no exception. "Okay, here's what we know," she said. "This Marissa is married to a major Republican donor. Lots of law and order, Back the Blue, lots of pictures of him with this governor and that senator. His family's rich—steel mills and lumber back in the day, real estate and tech companies now. My friends in Chicago say he's supported a number of right-wing groups. Not the real wackadoos, but the wackadoo-adjacents."

Ida swallowed hard. "And what about Marissa?"

"She's a bit of a question mark," Dani said. "They have two kids, and she does charity work, and goes to fundraisers and events with him, but as to whether she's Ginni to his Clarence, I couldn't say. Maybe she's a true believer. Maybe she doesn't believe any of it and just keeps her mouth shut." There was a pause, a silence Ida was, no doubt, meant to fill with her recollections of Marissa, their brief history, and her best guesses as to her old bunkmate's politics and intentions.

Ida didn't say a word. She closed her eyes. She could hear Frankie in the kitchen—the faint clink of silverware, the beeping of the toaster. Dani's voice was buzzing in her ear, insisting, again, that Ida tell her what had happened so that they could spin it, get out in front of it, control it.

"I promise, whatever happened, people love you, and we can find a way to make them understand—"

"I need to talk to Frankie. I'll call you after," Ida said. She slipped the phone into her bathrobe pocket. Words were rattling around in her brain: *Republican* and *major donor* and *rich*. This could be bad, she realized. This could be the end of everything.

"Hey." Frankie was coming toward her with a glass of white wine in one hand and a plate in the other. Toast and creamed corn. Ida smiled and forced herself to take a few bites before carrying the plate back to the kitchen.

"Come with me." Frankie took Ida's hand and led her into the Someday

Room and over to the bed. Ida lay on her side, little spoon to Frankie's big spoon, with her eyes closed and the tops of Frankie's feet tucked tight against her soles. It was in this position—as close as they could be, bodies touching from shoulders to heels—that they had their most personal conversations.

Ida breathed in her wife's scent—her tea tree face scrub, the lemongrass essential oil Frankie dabbed behind her ears. She anchored herself in the present—where she was happy, where she was married, where she was loved, where all those things would still be true, no matter what happened on the first Tuesday in November. She tuned out the way her own voice, her own words, echoed in her head: her promise that she'd always tell voters the truth. Because she'd never told anyone the whole truth. At least, not about this.

“I need to tell you about this press conference. I need to tell you about Marissa, and this boy named Donovan Coe. He was the first boy I ever had a crush on.”

Ida felt her wife shake her head. “Boys,” said Frankie. “Sometimes, I forget you like them.” Frankie—born Francesca—had come out to her parents and her entire sixth-grade class before her twelfth birthday. She had only ever been with women, while Ida, who'd always known she was bisexual, had dated men exclusively until Frankie—and in reality, hadn't dated much at all.

“Did he go to that camp?” asked Frankie.

Ida shook her head again, smiling faintly. “He worked there. He was the camp director's son.” Donovan wore white T-shirts that somehow remained pristine through a day of hauling trash and serving food in the dining hall. She remembered his tanned skin glowing against the white cotton, his biceps bulging against the short sleeves when he'd lift heavy trash bags and heave them into the dumpster.

“Okay. So this Donovan guy was your first crush.”

Ida thought, then shook her head. “No. He was the first boy I think I ever loved.”

“And Marissa?”

Ida swallowed hard. Ever since she'd heard Marissa's name, all the specifics she'd managed to push into the darkest corner of her brain had come back. She could see the other girl; she could hear the low, raspy timbre of her voice; she could smell her perfume—spice and musk, nothing like the light floral scents most girls their age favored. Marissa would spritz the golden liquid into a billowing cloud, then walk through while moving her hands in

gentle beckoning motions to draw the scent around her. Ida remembered the lacquer Marissa sprayed on her hair to keep it glossy, the cream Marissa massaged into her hands to keep them soft, and how Marissa's shampoo came from a salon and not a drugstore and cost sixty dollars a bottle. She remembered how surprised she'd been when Marissa had befriended her. She remembered how she'd ached with envy for all the beautiful things Marissa had—So many of them! So much!—and how guilty and ashamed that envy made her feel. And suddenly all that old pain was back, weighing down her shoulders, sitting heavy and sour in her throat.

“She was my bunkmate. She'd been coming to camp since she was twelve, so it was her fourth summer there. Her family had money. Everyone deferred to her. Even the counselors.” Ida's voice was slightly muffled, her face pillowed on Frankie's arm.

“Just because she was rich?” Frankie asked.

“It wasn't just that. She was . . .” Ida hummed, thinking, *Stylish. Glamorous. Sophisticated. Adult.* It wasn't just the money, it was the polish that the money had given her, the cities she'd visited, the plays and the art she'd seen. Marissa had an unshakable confidence that she could go anywhere in the world, walk into any room in any city and be welcomed there. It was a confidence that Ida didn't possess and thought she could never acquire.

Ida loved Frankie. But Frankie had grown up in Scarsdale with an insurance-executive dad and a stay-at-home mom who both doted on her, and Ida didn't think she could accurately communicate how it had felt for her, that one summer, to be confronted with the tangible evidence of everything she didn't have, to be smacked in the face with her own lack of not just money, not just things, but also, more crucially, love and affection. Frankie had parents who loved her, siblings who loved her, grandparents and cousins, a sprawling network of friends and cousins and cousins' friends and friends' cousins. Ida had had only her mother, who had been tired and distracted and permanently sad and had rarely looked at her own daughter without disappointment in her eyes. Even when Zoe was home, she wasn't really there, Ida had told Frankie once, remembering years of returning from school to an empty apartment; opening the door with her key; making dinner for herself after her mother called, the way she did most days, to say that she'd be late and that Ida shouldn't wait for her; leaving a plate in the toaster oven before she went to sleep. Years of piano recitals and choir concerts her

mother hadn't attended; years of parent-teacher conferences her mom had missed, and birthdays where her mom would give her a twenty-dollar bill and a Post-it Note that said "Happy Birthday," because she hadn't remembered to purchase either gift or card. Years of feeling secondary to her mother's work, years of suspecting that maybe it had been her father who'd wanted to start a family, and that maybe her mother had never wanted to be a mother at all.

"Marissa had so much. Clothes, jewelry—all these beautiful things." Ida closed her eyes, feeling tears trickling down her cheeks. "I was this little nothing. Well, not little. But—"

"Hey." Frankie pulled her close, squeezed her tightly. "Ida. You were never, ever nothing."

"No. I know. Of course I know. But—" Ida swallowed hard. How to explain how sad her single bottle of generic shampoo and conditioner and her single bar of soap had looked, in a plastic pail, beside Marissa's bounty? How to tell how she'd felt when her scant handfuls of clothing barely filled a single dresser drawer, while Marissa's wardrobe had overflowed her assigned space and the canvas boxes Marissa had brought with her? It had all felt symbolic, like the clothes and the accessories and the fancy shampoo were just stand-ins for the thing Marissa had that Ida would never possess: two parents who adored her and would buy anything, would do anything, to make her happy. Nor could she tell her wife about her most cherished, most secret wish that summer: that maybe if she lost weight, if she came home transformed, her mother would finally love her the same way.

2004

Ida Berkowitz had the highest hopes for Camp Golden Hills. She believed it was a place where magic happened—a fat girl’s Narnia, a place where she would be refined and perfected and made beautiful. Even the ads she’d seen, no larger than postage stamps on the back pages of the *New Yorkers* she cadged from the building’s recycling bins, had felt like a secret code, a message visible only to those who needed to see them. The ads depicted a beaming young man, thumb hooked into the waistband of a pair of shorts that were clearly way too big for him. The boy’s expression conveyed unmitigated triumph and an all-encompassing (if slightly unhinged) joy. The text underneath him promised viewers that after a stay at Camp Golden Hills, any child could enjoy the same success.

For most of her early life, Ida hadn’t thought about her body. She’d been prized and praised and rewarded for her brains, whether she was helping her mother finish the crossword puzzle or burning through a problem set in algebra class or coming up with a quick retort in the cafeteria. Then when she was twelve, her breasts had developed, her hips had turned curvy, and even when she wore oversize sweatshirts with sleeves that hung past her fingertips, men and boys noticed. They’d stare, they’d say things, they’d follow her along the sidewalk or rub up against her on the subway. They’d make noises. It was awful. What was even worse was the way women just seemed to accept it, to tune out the attention or write it off as the price of living in the world in a female body, a toll that men never had to pay, no matter what their bodies looked like.

“It isn’t fair,” she’d told her mother once.

Zoe, who’d been at the sink, washing dishes, had just sighed. “A lot of things aren’t fair,” she’d said. Then without turning, she’d said, “And maybe you wouldn’t be getting so much attention if you weren’t so noticeable.”

It was the closest that Ida’s slender mother, who didn’t like sweets and

often forgot to eat meals, would come to criticizing Ida's body. Ida remembered how her guts had twisted, like she was going to throw up, how her face had burned like it had been slapped.

She'd always loved food—preparing it, consuming it, planning her next meal. She did most of the cooking for herself and her mother. She'd make carbohydrate-heavy comfort foods: arroz con pollo from her friend's mother's recipe, her nana's matzo ball soup, chocolate-chip cookies enriched with tahini and sprinkled with crunchy sea salt. She'd eat when she was hungry, or sad, or lonely, and delicious food plus genetic propensity meant she was wearing plus sizes by the time she started high school.

By then, Ida hated her body. She hated the silvery stretch marks that ran down the sides of her breasts, along her hips, and across her belly, and the ugly beige bras with four or even five rows of hooks she had to wear. She hated the attention her body engendered. She hated, most of all, how her outsides no longer matched her insides, how her brain was fast and agile and her body was none of those things. She thought it made her look lazy and undisciplined. Like she was a slattern or a sexpot when, in reality, she was a hard worker and a virgin. And so, in that moment, her belly still roiling, her face still burning, her mother's words still echoing in her brain, Ida had decided to make herself thin and that Camp Golden Hills would be the instrument of her will.

Except, of course, her mother shot her down. "We don't have money for that," Zoe Berkowitz had said when Ida showed her the ad. Ida's mother was an immigration attorney who worked for the Legal Aid Society. It was exhausting work, and it barely paid them enough to keep a roof over their heads, as Zoe liked to say . . . but that work had been her dream, back when she'd been married.

Zoe Jeffries had been a sophomore at Columbia when she'd met Daniel Berkowitz. She'd grown up in a middle-class family in Jersey City, where her father was a plumber and her mother a police dispatcher. Daniel, the son of a doctor and a lawyer, had grown up comfortably upper-middle class. They'd married when they were both twenty-two, the first of their classmates to make the trip down the aisle, and Ida, named after Ida B. Wells, had been born the following year. The plan was for Zoe and Daniel to get their law degrees and work in the city. One of them would take a job in a big firm and pay the bills, while the other would work to get justice for the poor and the disadvantaged. After five or six years, they'd switch.

That wasn't what had happened. When Daniel was twenty-seven, he was killed in a cycling accident, hit by a trash truck hurrying through a yellow light as he was on his way to class, leaving Zoe a young widow with a three-year-old and student loans that needed to be repaid.

As a teenager, Ida had wondered why Zoe had persisted in such thankless, low-paying work, why she hadn't spent at least a few years working for one of the big law firms, where the grueling hours and dull work at least came with a six-figure salary. As an adult, she eventually found much to admire in her mother's commitment to public service (as well as her refusal to work in a conservative, male-dominated environment that rewarded unhealthily long hours). But back then, she felt like Zoe had chosen work over her only daughter, that her mother gave all her time and empathy to the city's poor immigrants and had nothing left for Ida.

"If you want to lose weight, eat less and exercise more. You can start by taking out the trash," Zoe had said, her voice clipped, her face closed off and tired. And Ida had.

But Ida also had emailed the camp directly, explaining her situation and requesting a brochure, along with any information about scholarships or financial aid. When the camp director had written back, saying that they did, indeed, offer scholarships, Ida had applied. She hadn't been surprised when she'd gotten one. She'd spent her life since pre-K in gifted and talented programs, accelerated classes, and eventually a magnet school that drew the top students from all five boroughs. If there was a fair or a bee or any kind of contest in a subject—spelling, geography, science—Ida would usually win it. She was confident that Camp Golden Hills would find her worthy and that she'd win at weight loss the way she'd won at everything else: conquering her body like it was a problem set in her calculus class or an especially thorny sentence she'd been told to diagram.

When Camp Golden Hills sent a list of what to pack, Ida followed its instructions diligently, rolling her shorts and T-shirts into bundles and putting them all into a duffel bag. Her mother was working the day camp began, so Ida purchased a bus ticket from Port Authority to Oneonta. She would arrive upstate at one o'clock, and the camp director's son would pick her up at the bus stop. "He'll be in a silver minivan with the camp's decal on the side. His name's Donovan," the camp director had written.

On that first afternoon, Ida had climbed off the bus, hot and sticky, her hair frizzy, and her sweatshirt clinging to the small of her back. She had her

duffel bag over her shoulder, the copy of *Lord of the Rings* she'd been reading in her right hand with her forefinger marking her place. A silver minivan with the camp's name and logo—a crossed knife and fork—was waiting at the curb across the street from the bus station. As she watched, the front door opened and a lanky, dark-haired guy maybe a year or two older than she was climbed out. He wore jeans and a CAMP GOLDEN HILLS T-shirt. Ida found that her heart was beating unusually fast and that her mouth had gone dry.

“Ida?” he asked.

She knew she should have asked him his name, that he could have been a kidnapper, someone who'd stolen the van (and the T-shirt) from camp and was going to sell her to human traffickers, to be enjoyed by clients with very specific tastes. But instead of doing the prudent thing, Ida nodded and let him take her bag. She climbed into the passenger's seat, surreptitiously smoothing her ponytail, holding down the seat belt with her left hand so it wouldn't slide over her boobs and creep up under her chin.

“You enjoying that book?” he asked, glancing over his right shoulder as he put the minivan into reverse.

“I am,” she said.

“Who's your favorite hobbit?”

“Sam,” Ida said.

“Not Frodo?” The boy's voice was teasing.

Ida shook her head. “Sam is”—she gave the seat belt a discreet yank—“steadfast. He's not trying to be a hero. He just wants to help his friend.”

Donovan nodded thoughtfully. “I was always more of an Elrond guy myself.”

“Elrond's not a hobbit!” Heat flooded her face as she heard the words out loud and realized that whatever chances of romance she'd imagined would diminish with every sentence she uttered about *Lord of the Rings*.

Ida had never felt this way, like her mind had suddenly turned into a version of the kitchen sink that would sputter and do nothing but make odd noises right after you turned it on. She'd rarely felt tongue-tied, she couldn't remember ever feeling stupid, and she'd never been shy about expressing an opinion about books. But this boy, with his strong arms and his clean, piney smell, made her stammer and stumble. He made her feel flushed and starry-eyed and, somehow, girlish. Which shouldn't have been strange, given that she was a girl, but there it was.

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

Trick question, Ida thought. Normally the answer would have been *always*, but in that moment, food was the furthest thing from her mind. Before she could come up with an answer, he said, “I’m starving.”

Donovan swung the minivan into the drive-through lane at McDonald’s. “What’s your pleasure?”

Oh, God. “McNuggets,” Ida managed, even as her traitorous, lecherous brain served up an image of Donovan Coe asking her the same question as he bent close to kiss her.

“What do you want to drink?” Before she could answer, he said, “My sincere advice to you would be to get a chocolate shake. You’re not going to get anything close to that good for the next six weeks.”

Ida nodded.

“What kind of dipping sauce?”

This was too many questions, requiring too many words. Ida wanted simultaneously to stop time so she could just sit and look at Donovan, and to speed time up so she could be alone somewhere and alchemize this moment into a memory, something sweet to be savored when her mother ignored her or forgot to attend her awards banquet, or when the boys at school called her Ore Ida, which, of course, had become Whore Ida by the time she was in sixth grade.

“Barbecue.” She actually liked honey, except some places didn’t have honey, or they’d give her honey mustard instead, which she didn’t like at all. But then Donovan ordered honey with his nuggets, plus a Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese Meal, which he had supersized (“We can share the fries”). There was a picnic table on the lawn by the side of the restaurant. “Let’s eat here,” Donovan said, lowering his voice to a stage whisper. “I’ll get in trouble if I come back with the car smelling like fast food.”

He set out the food, and he asked her about her favorite books. She learned that he was seventeen, going into his senior year in high school, that he wanted to study hospitality or sports management and maybe work for the NBA. By the time she finally arrived at camp, an hour later, Ida was in love. Head over heels, her heart completely gone.

That was before she met the other girls in her bunk. That was before she met Marissa.

In 2004, female celebrities were uniformly tiny. They flaunted their frames in skinny jeans that rode below their hip bones, and showed off their flat bellies in crop tops. Marissa Schuyler had her own look: classic and polished and feminine—a look that, after years of working with a stylist, Ida would be able to replicate and would adopt as her own. That first day of camp, Marissa wore a blue linen dress that clung gently at her bosom and hips in a manner that hinted at curves without being tight or obvious. A dark-blue headband swept her hair back to display her pretty, dimpled face—her flawless skin and wide-spaced eyes and small, rosy mouth.

Instead of sneakers or Tevas or Birkenstocks, Marissa wore a pair of flat-soled patent-leather sandals in the same shade of navy as the dress. A cluster of charms on a fine gold chain hung around her neck. Her fingernails were manicured, filed into ovals and painted the palest shade of pink, and her voice, low and sultry, made Ida think of Broadway divas, cocktails, and cigarettes.

“Hi. I’m Marissa. I’m your bunkmate.”

When Marissa extended her hand, Ida saw the bracelet Marissa wore around her right wrist, a gleaming circle of pinkish gold with a heart-shaped charm dangling from its center. Ida swallowed hard, struck by a wave of envy and covetousness like she’d never known. She felt like Gollum gloating over his Precious, because she wanted that pretty thing, wanted it on her own arm, where the gold would contrast beautifully with her skin. Later, she would learn it was a Tiffany bracelet and that it cost almost \$1,000, and that she could never hope to have one, not in a million years.

Marissa had claimed the bottom bunk, and her bed was already made—a floral-patterned duvet, two pillows in matching shams, plus a pale-pink bolster. Ida saw that Marissa had already covered the wall beside her bed with photographs and postcards of beaches and mountains—all places she’d been, Ida had no doubt. There was a small, fluffy white rug next to her bed, with a pair of pink slippers resting right where Marissa would slip her feet into them in the morning. Underneath the bed were rows of canvas storage boxes. On top of her dresser was a foldout mirror surrounded by tiny frosted light bulbs, glass perfume bottles, one with an old-fashioned atomizer, and a lacquered wooden jewelry box that breathed the scent of cedar into the room when Marissa opened its lid.

“Come on,” she said as Ida unzipped her duffel. “Give me your sheets. I’ll help you.” Together, they maneuvered the mattress off the top bunk and

wrestled the fitted sheet in place. Marissa slipped Ida's pillowcase over the single pillow the camp had provided, and smoothed Ida's plain blue comforter on top. "There!" she said, looking pleased.

"Thank you," Ida said, feeling shy and abashed and a little astonished that this beautiful girl was helping her.

Marissa, meanwhile, was inspecting the paltry contents of Ida's bag, looking sympathetic. "You can borrow anything you want," she said with a smile that showed her small, even teeth and made her dimples flash. "My mother went crazy at Nordstrom before we left."

Ida thanked her again, then looked around, smelling the faintly musty odor of the cabin, along with perfume and hairspray. She saw posters and pictures and Laura Ashley bedding and the extra pillows the other girls had known to bring from home. She watched her bunkmates unpacking T-shirts and jeans and swimsuits in multiples, different shoes for the different sports they planned on playing. She saw hair mousse and hot rollers; earrings and bracelets and makeup; fancy linens for their beds and tennis rackets.

Ida had five pairs of plain cotton underwear and five bras (three underwire, two sports—all five, like most of her clothing, from the sales rack at Lane Bryant). She had three pairs of shorts, four T-shirts, a single sweatshirt, a single swimsuit, one pair of sneakers, a pair of shower shoes, a raincoat, and an oversize Columbia T-shirt that she used as a nightgown. She had a bottle of shampoo and a bottle of conditioner and a bar of soap, deodorant, sunscreen, and insect repellent, all generic. She had no posters, no pictures, no tennis racket (she'd never set foot on a tennis court). Her only jewelry was the gold Star of David necklace her father's parents had given her, and she had no hope of getting anything new. Unlike Marissa, whose parents had promised her prizes for every five pounds she lost. "If I lose twenty pounds, they're going to get me the rose-gold Chanel bangle. If I lose twenty-five, they'll get me diamond stud earrings."

Ida told herself not to care. She'd come to camp to transform herself, and for that she didn't need special sneakers or gold bracelets or a velour tracksuit with JUICY printed on the ass. She only needed the things that had gotten her as far as she'd come and could take her even further: her brains and the force of her will. It didn't matter that none of these girls would want to be her friend.

But her bunkmates—Marissa, in particular—surprised her. All of them came from wealthier families, true. All of them had two parents who loved

them, even if those parents were divorced. But all of them were also suffering as she was, hungry and headachy with their bellies growling, exercising constantly, eating just twelve hundred calories a day. It hadn't mattered too much that Ida only had one swimsuit, that she didn't have nice clothes or extra shoes, that she was geeky or awkward or weird, that she had only one parent, and that she had never gone skiing or sailing or to a beach that wasn't at the Jersey shore. Her body was her ticket into this new sisterhood, the only qualification she needed . . . and Ida discovered that she liked being part of a crowd. She learned, too, that she could be persuasive, that she was a good public speaker, passionate and quick on her feet. She was surprised, then inordinately pleased, when she was unanimously elected as Bunk Nine's representative to the Camp Council, a body that gave input to the camp director on such important matters as which movies to show on Friday night and the playlist for the end-of-summer dance. By the end of the first week, Ida felt closer to the girls of Bunk Nine than she had to any girls she'd known back at home for years. And somehow, improbably, Marissa Schuyler had become her friend.

At night, the girls gave each other makeovers, or played Hearts or Crazy Eights, or had dance parties in their pajamas, where they took turns lip-synching into hairbrushes. Chelsea taught Ida the dance routine to Britney Spears's ". . . Baby One More Time," and Abby styled her hair in elaborate French braids. After lights-out, Ida and Marissa would whisper together.

"Favorite song," Marissa had asked the first night of camp.

"What?" Ida whispered back.

"What's your favorite song?"

Ida considered. "The Winner Takes It All."

"ABBA? Old school," Marissa said approvingly. "Okay. If you could take any man in the world to your prom, who'd you take?"

This one Ida didn't have to think about. "Adam Sandler."

"Seriously?"

"He's funny! And, you know, cute but attainable."

"Cute but attainable," Marissa repeated. "I like that."

"Who would you pick?"

"Prince Harry," Marissa said immediately. "He's adorable."

"Cute but unattainable," Ida said.

"Well, you never know," said Marissa. Her tone was light but matter-of-fact, as if meeting, then dating Prince Harry were completely possible.

“Maybe in college I’ll do a semester abroad. I’ll study in London and he’ll see me outside Buckingham Palace . . .”

“Does he actually live there?”

“Well, during the school year he’s at boarding school at Eton.”

Marissa, it emerged, knew a lot about the royals. *It makes sense*, Ida thought. Marissa was half royalty herself. Of course she’d want the real thing.

“Okay,” Marissa said. Ida could hear her smiling. They were moving on to the evening’s main event, the most important questions, the most cherished debate. “If you could have anything for dinner . . .”

“Prime rib,” Ida said immediately. Dinner that night in the dining hall had been four ounces of boneless, skinless chicken breast, steamed broccoli, and half a baked sweet potato. “With mashed potatoes and chocolate mousse with real whipped cream for dessert.”

“*Mmm*,” said Marissa. “I’d do breakfast for dinner. Belgian waffles with real maple syrup, eggs Benedict, and fresh orange juice.”

Ida hummed happily, mouth watering, homesickness forgotten. “Don’t forget fried chicken.”

“Oh, God. And doughnuts! There’s this place in Chicago that makes the most amazing doughnuts. You’ll have to come visit me, and I’ll take you there.”

Ida smiled . . . and when she fell asleep, she dreamed of doughnuts.

Ida had never worn makeup beyond a single swipe of lipstick, but Marissa was an expert, who’d come to camp with a department store’s worth of supplies. On the first Friday night of that first week, she convinced Ida to let her paint her face.

Ida had been sitting on Abby’s bunk, content just to watch Marissa do the other girls, but Marissa had patted the spot on her flowered comforter and said, “I promise it won’t hurt,” until Ida had relented. Marissa’s fingers had been deft and gentle as she tweezed Ida’s eyebrows, then combed out Ida’s hair and divided it into sections. She’d sprayed different products, murmuring about moisture and frizz, then twirled each segment around and around the barrel of the curling iron, hissing, counting to ten under her breath before letting it go, releasing one shiny, perfect ringlet after another. After half an hour, Marissa put her hands on Ida’s shoulders as she turned Ida toward the mirror. Ida saw Marissa’s face smiling behind hers as she stared at herself in

awe.

“I’m so pretty!” Ida blurted, and Marissa laughed, looking pleased. For years, when Ida was getting her hair and makeup done in preparation for a television appearance or a big event, she would remember that night and how generous Marissa had been, the feeling of the other girl’s hands, light and sure and gentle, tilting her head from side to side or using a sponge to blend foundation onto her skin.

That night, Marissa let the other girls try on her bracelet. Ida went last. She remembered the cold wash of fear that she’d lose or damage something so expensive, the sharp bite of longing at how badly she wanted it anyhow. She remembered the weight of the metal against her skin, the minty smell of Marissa’s breath on her face as she fastened the clasp.

“You can wear it tomorrow, if you want to,” Marissa said.

Ida did want to. She wanted to wear that magical bracelet with a yearning that felt like a cramp. Every time she moved, she could feel its heft, a weight that made her hold her hand, her arm, her whole body differently. And she would see Donovan at breakfast. He worked behind the steam table and managed to look handsome even with a hairnet on. Every day of camp, he’d given her a smile as he scooped scrambled eggs onto her plate, or he’d come by Bunk Nine’s table to say hello to her—just to her—after breakfast, or he’d wave when she was leaving the dining hall and he was carrying bags of trash out to the dumpster. Ida cherished every look, every word. A glimpse could sustain her for a day; a sentence could keep her awake at night for hours.

She’d been at camp for a week—a week of private smiles and quick hellos with Donovan, a week of late-night whispering and afternoon hikes with Marissa, listening to her friend refine her plan to capture Prince Harry’s attention and, eventually, his heart—when Donovan approached her on her way out of the dining hall after dinner.

“Hey, can you come give me a hand with something?” he asked. Abby and Laura had stared, eyes wide, as Ida followed him out to the back of the dining hall, where it smelled like cooking oil and decaying garbage.

“Hey,” he said softly.

“Hey,” Ida said back.

She wasn’t sure what would happen next. She didn’t know how to move whatever this was between them forward, how to let him know how much she liked him. Donovan took her by the hand, easing her back against the

building, and then he kissed her.

Donovan was an excellent kisser, clearly experienced, his tongue licking at her lips and darting expertly into her mouth, like a dance Ida gradually learned to follow. He kissed her and nibbled at the side of her neck, pressing against her in a way that let her feel his arousal, and it felt so good—so good to be kissed, so good to be touched, so good to be wanted. Ida would have let him touch her anywhere, would have let him do anything. For the first time she could remember, her anxious, chattering brain went quiet, leaving her entirely in her body, feeling Donovan's mouth against hers, one of his hands on the small of her back, the other cupping her head like she was the most delicate, precious thing in the world.

After some unknowable length of time, Donovan whispered, "Gotta go." He quickly adjusted himself, which made Ida flush with arousal and pride that she'd made that happen, that she'd made him want her. He'd gone back to the kitchen, and Ida had gone back to her bunk, certain that people would be able to look at her and know what she'd been up to. But when she arrived, people barely noticed. Abby gave her a hard look, but Kelsey and Christie were playing Hearts on Kelsey's bunk bed, and they didn't even look up. Olivia was writing to her mother, reading the occasional line out loud for the bunk's amusement: *Yes, this time I promise I am trying my hardest, and I'm sure I'll lose at least ten pounds and maybe more.* Allison was using her tweezers to extract individually wrapped Rolos from the inside of a sanitary napkin, where she'd hidden them at the start of the week. Ida was sitting on her bunk, listening to the music and the voices, feeling an unfamiliar kind of contentment. *Maybe this is what it's like to have sisters,* she thought. Or lots of friends. Or even just a mom who's home at night and wants to talk to you.

She opened her mouth, thinking she'd tell her new friends about Donovan; maybe ask their advice about whether she could get in trouble for fraternizing with a camp employee. Before she could speak, Hannah asked Marissa, "Have you gone out with him yet?"

Marissa had been sitting on her bed. She turned to Hannah and shook her head, a small, secretive smile curling her lips. "Not yet. But tomorrow's his day off. Last summer he'd throw pebbles at my window in the middle of the night."

"Did he really say he'd take you to the drive-in?" Hannah asked.

Marissa nodded. "We have to be careful, because he'd get in trouble if his mother found out," she said, still with that dreamy look on her face, that

small, satisfied smile on her lips. “But he’s going to look at colleges in the fall, and he already told me he’s going to come to Chicago to see Northwestern.”

Ida felt her belly twist and tasted something sour. Donovan had mentioned that very school to Ida the first day they’d met, on the way to McDonald’s.

Maybe it’s a coincidence, she thought, but made herself ask, “Who are you talking about?” She hoped her voice sounded steady.

Marissa turned to Ida, beaming. “Donovan Coe,” she said. “Do you know who he is?”

Ida felt her face go numb, her heart stuttering to a stop, and Abby was giving her a hard look again.

“He’s the camp director’s son,” Marissa said. “The cute one who works in the dining hall.” *The one who took you out behind the dining hall forty-five minutes ago*, Abby’s expression said to Ida.

“You and Donovan Coe are dating?” Ida’s voice sounded steady as she surreptitiously wiped her sweating hands on her shorts.

“Not yet. But we’re going to be,” Marissa said, as confident as if she’d been predicting the sun’s appearance in the east at dawn the next day. “We were flirting all last summer, but I was just fifteen then. I’m older now.”

Marissa smiled, a wise, knowing, confident smile . . . and Ida felt a stab of something unexpected, something new. She was used to feeling competitive with her classmates over academic honors and prizes. She’d never competed with a girl over a boy. Boys had never been interested in her, and she’d never been interested in them. Now she was competing with the prettiest, the most composed and elegant and regal girl at camp, a girl who’d become her friend, for Donovan. And as improbable as it felt, it seemed she’d already won. Unless Donovan was planning on stringing both of them along.

Tell her, Ida thought. *Tell her you know who he is because he’s kissed you about a hundred times*. But she didn’t. She didn’t want to hurt Marissa, or to be hurt herself if Marissa got angry. Worst of all, she could imagine a scenario where no one believed her, where her bunkmates accused her of lying. Because why would Donovan want plain, frizzy-haired Ida in her three-for-twenty-dollar T-shirts, when he could have Marissa, Camp Golden Hills’s queen?

“What about Prince Harry?” she asked through numb lips.

“Well, he’s in England, and I’m here,” Marissa said, her tone very

matter-of-fact. “And for the time being, Donovan Coe is a perfectly acceptable substitute.”

That night, Ida lay awake, listening for the rattle of pebbles against the window screens or the creak of the wooden floors. She heard nothing . . . and as she drifted off to sleep, there was a new kind of smile on her lips. A gloating, prideful smile, almost a smirk, as unpleasant as it was unfamiliar. Ida felt its return the next morning when Marissa stretched ostentatiously, murmuring, “I’m sooo tired,” as she yawned.

“Late night?” Laura asked. Marissa gave a tiny, pleased smile, gathered her towel, her bucket full of expensive bodywash and conditioner and shampoo, and sashayed toward the bathhouse.

Ida watched her go. *She’s lying*, she thought. And . . . *What will happen if I tell the truth?* The answer, she realized, was nothing good. Marissa might not believe her. Or Marissa would be angry, thinking that Ida had stolen Donovan away from her, even though that wasn’t what had happened. *He picked me*, Ida thought . . . only, in addition to happiness, the thought sent something sour and spiked curling through her midsection. Marissa was her friend. She didn’t want to hurt Marissa or embarrass her.

As if you could, a scornful voice whispered inside her head. Marissa had everything: clothes and jewelry and parents who loved her, who sent her prizes for every five pounds she lost. What did Ida have, compared to that? What was she, compared to a girl like Marissa?

That night, Donovan drew Ida back behind the dining hall again. In between kisses, she made herself ask, “Do you like Marissa Schuyler?” Her voice had gone low and husky, and it sounded strange in her own ears.

“Who’s Marissa Schuyler?” Donovan asked, sounding just as breathless as Ida, and Ida had felt a shiver of gloating pleasure run through her.

“She’s in my bunk. She said you guys talked about hooking up last summer.”

Donovan looked startled. Then he shook his head. “I’ve never been with any of the campers. It’s against the rules. My mom would kill me.” He brought his lips close to her ear. “I never wanted to do it before.”

Ida’s entire body was flushing. She felt almost faint with the pleasure of his mouth against her skin, a little dizzy with a smug sense of victory, and a prickly feeling of unease.

“Why me? Is it because I was reading *Lord of the Rings*?”

Donovan thought it over. “That was part of it. We like the same things.

And I like to make you smile.” He kissed her again, slowly and thoroughly. “I like doing that, too.”

Ida thought she was going to swoon, that she was going to fall right to the floor and never get up again. *Cause of death: exploded heart.* It made her bold enough to press her hips against him, feeling the length of him hard against her belly, for the pleasure of hearing him sigh.

The six weeks of camp sped by. Ida’s bunkmates set their sights on the male campers, whose bunks were on the other side of the lake. Abby started dating a boy named Mark from Long Island, who wore a T-shirt into the water and a sweatshirt everywhere else, the better to disguise his chest, and Kelsey, scandalously, dated both members of a pair of twins from Yonkers. Ida had never suspected that fat camp would be such a hotbed of young love and raging hormones until she realized that in the real world, the campers were outcasts, but here, they were normal teenagers. Not just normal but desirable. (Although the campers weren’t immune from the real world’s vicious hierarchy. At camp, as in life, the thinner girls had more boys to choose from.)

During the daytime, Ida slipped away with Donovan whenever she could. At night, she listened to Marissa spin stories about their dates, how she and Donovan had sneaked off to the drive-in in the camp’s minivan or gone skinny-dipping in the lake. Marissa’s reports were detailed, so specific and convincing that even Ida sometimes found herself wondering if she was the one making it all up. It made sense that Donovan would want Marissa, not her. Except Ida was the one whose cheeks and chin were permanently abraded from Donovan’s stubble. She was the one whose neck and collarbones had marks where he’d kissed and sucked. Once, he left a note under her pillow: their initials, together in a heart. And at least a few of the times Marissa had claimed to be with Donovan, Ida knew that Donovan had been with her.

A dozen times, Ida had come close to confronting Marissa, or even calling her out in front of the whole bunk. Ida was the one who should have had bragging rights. Ida should have been thrilling the other girls with stories about romantic rendezvous. Her tales, like Marissa’s, would have been laden with details, with sweet declarations and lingering kisses. They would have also had the benefit of being true. But a dozen times, Ida kept her mouth shut,

not wanting to tempt Marissa's wrath or to risk the other girls calling her a liar. She knew the truth. That would have to be enough.

Then there was just one week left of camp, then just three days, then just one. Those last days and hours were a frantic rush of whispers and meaningful glances and passed notes, of clandestine meetings behind the boathouse or near the outhouse by the firepit. There were tears and drama, breakups and reconciliations. Girls swapped clothes and shoes, the ones who'd lost the most weight eager to show off their new figures or debut new hairstyles. Through it all, Marissa presided over Bunk Nine with that smug I've-got-a-secret look on her pretty, dimpled face.

"Who are you going to the dance with?" Ida asked her.

"Oh, I'm going solo," Marissa said airily. She held her wrist out in front of her, turning it from side to side, admiring its golden-pink glint in the sunlight. Her twenty-pound prize, the Chanel bangle, had arrived via FedEx just that morning. "Donovan's supposed to be working, but we'll probably meet down by the lake."

Except Ida knew that Donovan wouldn't be anywhere near the lake, because they'd made plans to meet by the flagpole at ten o'clock. He had a blanket, he'd told her. They could climb to the top of the hill behind the pavilion and look at the stars.

"Just be careful," Abby told Ida the night of the dance. Abby was the one camper in whom Ida had confided, the only girl in the bunk who knew what was really going on—and what wasn't. Ida and Abby had bonded over their perpetually disappointed mothers—Ida's, thin and indifferent, Abby's constantly restricting her intake, watching every morsel that went into her mouth, weighing every serving of chicken breast, and counting out her late-afternoon almonds. "If you do meet him, make sure Marissa doesn't see."

Ida had promised. She meant it, at the time. But love or lust or pride, or some toxic combination of all three, made her reckless and covetous, hungry for all the pretty things around her. She'd even channeled a boldness she'd never suspected she possessed and asked Marissa to do her makeup, instead of waiting for Marissa to offer.

"Are you going with someone?" Marissa asked, brushing shades of taupe and gold onto Ida's eyelids.

Ida considered her response. "No one's asked." She made sure to sigh, to sound glum and look disappointed. It wasn't hard to channel the girl she'd been six weeks ago, the one who'd never felt noticed except in all the wrong

ways, the one who'd never been kissed or felt Donovan Coe's hands gripping her hips and his tongue brushing delicately against hers. And did she feel guilty that she'd let Marissa lie and lie when she knew the truth? She did. But mixed in with the guilt, outweighing it, was envy. Marissa had so much. Clothes and jewelry and parents who sent her expensive prizes. All the campers had more than she did. Even her friend Abby had a father who loved her, who didn't care that she was fat, who'd promised that next summer she could go to theater camp instead of fat camp.

"Well," Marissa said, picking up an eyebrow pencil. "Even if you don't have a date, it'll be fun." She put her hand on Ida's chin, turning her face left, then right, before smiling. "There you go, beautiful. All done." Ida got to her feet, and Marissa rose, too, and pulled Ida close, hugging her tightly. "I'm so glad we're friends," she said.

Ida felt her eyes fill with tears and her heart pound with self-loathing. The secret she'd been keeping had hopped right to her tongue, where it sat like a toad in a fairy tale. *Donovan doesn't love you. He's dating me.* But Ida didn't say it. Instead, she managed a smile, and said, "I'm glad, too."

After all the girls had left for the pavilion, Ida lingered by the bunk bed she shared with Marissa. She looked at herself in the cabin's full-length mirror: borrowed shirt, tight around her bust. Borrowed pants, just a little too short. Abby's chandelier-style earrings sparkled and swung against her cheeks, and she wore her own sneakers on her feet. She stared at her reflection . . . and then, it was as if her body made the decision for her. One moment, Ida was standing still. The next, she was watching her body walk to Marissa's dresser, which was still scattered with the makeup she'd used to paint Ida's face.

She'd assumed Marissa would be wearing her bangle to the dance, but when she lifted the top of the lacquered wooden box, there was the bracelet, tucked into its own special velvet nook. Ida stared at it, barely breathing, as a wave of envy swept through her, a sickening sensation that made her mouth flood with spit and her hands clench into fists. Her skin was hot, and her whole body trembled. *So much*, she thought, through the noise that sounded like the thunder of a hundred drums pounding in her head. *They have so much.* Her bunkmates all had clothes and jewelry and things. Friends and relatives. Families. Tomorrow, Marissa would go home to two parents who loved her, and Ida would go home to one parent who didn't, without even a

boyfriend as a consolation prize. She and Donovan weren't planning on keeping in touch. Ida would go back to the city, where her mother would frown or, worse, look right through her, where there was no father to tell her that she was beautiful. If Marissa confided in them, her parents would console her and promise her that she was loved. Ida's mother wouldn't ask what had happened at camp or even notice her daughter's sorrow. Ida's mother wouldn't notice her at all.

Ida stared down into Marissa's jewelry box. And then, almost without thinking, she pulled the bracelet out, slipped it on her wrist, and went running out the door and into the night.

For years, she had been able to recall every detail of that night: the warmth of the late-summer air, the wash of colored lights from the pavilion, and the sound of Kelly Clarkson's voice singing about spreading her wings, about learning to fly. She remembered lying next to Donovan on the blanket—they hadn't even been kissing, just holding hands. She'd been wondering if he was going to tell her that he loved her, when suddenly, Marissa was standing right over them.

Ida remembered her friend's face, that rosebud mouth falling open, those wide-spaced eyes going blank. She could still recall Marissa's shocked, slapped look: the look of a girl for whom nothing had ever gone wrong, realizing her big lie had been revealed and that Ida had known she was lying all along.

Ida felt a spasm of shame, a twist of guilt, and a jolt of that awful, mean gloating. *See how you like it. See how you like it when someone else has the thing you want.* She remembered the confused look on Donovan's face, all the confirmation she could wish that nothing was going on with him and Marissa.

Most of all, she remembered the weight of Marissa's bangle on her wrist, like a handcuff or a shackle. Ida tried to put her hand behind her back, which, of course, only drew Marissa's gaze from Ida's face to the bracelet.

Marissa didn't scream or shout. When she spoke, her voice cracked, and she sounded so hurt that Ida ached for her. "I thought you were my friend," she said to Ida before walking away, head held high.

Donovan had watched her go, then looked down at Ida, puzzled. "What was that about?" he'd asked. "What's going on?"

“Nothing,” Ida whispered back. She was shivering. Donovan gave her his sweatshirt. He held her hand. And when he started kissing her again, Ida closed her eyes, willing herself to be in the moment, to forget about Marissa and take what she could, because it would have to be enough to sustain her when she was home.

An hour later, back at Bunk Nine, she’d barely gotten her foot on the first of the three steps to the front door when the door swung open, and Ida saw two police officers standing in the cabin with crackling walkie-talkies and guns hanging from their belts. The camp director was there, her hand on Marissa’s shoulder. Marissa’s pretty face was puffy under the cabin’s light and blotched from her tears, but her hand and voice had been steady as she’d pointed at Ida. “There she is,” she said. “She’s the one who took my bracelet.”

Wait. Back up. Marissa called the cops?” Frankie sounded outraged, which Ida found gratifying.

Ida shrugged. “I don’t know if getting the police involved was Marissa’s decision or Mrs. Coe’s. But Marissa told the officers that I’d stolen her bracelet. That she’d let other girls wear her jewelry. Because she was friends with them, but not me.” Ida’s chest felt heavy. Her voice sounded like it was floating up from a basement; someplace far away, from a time long ago. She’d forgotten how much Marissa’s repudiation had hurt, how much that friendship had meant to her. She’d had so few friends back then.

“Did you tell the cops that she said you could borrow her stuff?” Frankie asked.

“But she’d never given me permission to borrow *that*. She could claim I’d stolen it. Which is what she did. And there’s still a police report, I imagine.” Ida remembered that she hadn’t even thought to take it off her wrist and put it in her pocket, to try to hide or dissemble about what she’d done. She’d felt guilty. She’d *been* guilty.

“Which brings us to today.” Ida knew what this revelation could do to her campaign and reputation, how it contradicted her reputation as a truth teller, a feminist, and an ally to women. *Girl power!* she heard a staffer shout, ironically, in her head. So much for sisterhood. So much for helping other women and holding the door open, and being their friend.

“The policemen gave Marissa a lecture about bringing expensive jewelry to camp. Marissa said she didn’t think she’d be bunking with the kind of people who’d steal.” Ida felt her eyes burning. Her throat grew tight with remembered shame. “I slept in the nurse’s office that night. Mrs. Coe drove me to the bus station first thing in the morning.” Ida remembered hoping the camp director would offer some comfort, that she’d tell Ida that she knew Marissa was lying, but Mrs. Coe hadn’t said a word. Not even *goodbye*. “Marissa’s parents were supposed to pick her up the next morning. And that was the last time I saw her. I haven’t spoken to her since.”

Frankie paused, considering. “Do you think she’s going to say you’re a thief? Or wave the police report around?”

“I don’t know.” Ida tried for a chuckle. “I guess we’ll find out

tomorrow.” She tucked a pillow under her cheek, closing her eyes, and when her wife asked, “Are you crying?” Ida lied and said, “No.”

The press conference was held in some anonymous-looking Chicago hotel conference room, where a wooden lectern stood against a backdrop of cream-and-gold drapes. Ida had wanted to stay home, to watch Marissa take her revenge from the safety of her bed, preferably with Frankie holding her hand, but she knew she couldn't keep hiding.

So Ida got up after a sleepless night, got dressed, and went to her campaign's headquarters in Yorkville. The mood was somber, the two dozen staffers unusually quiet, the phones on their desks ringing, unanswered. The story hadn't made it to the national level, but social media was on fire. On New York City Twitter, three of the top five trending topics were about Ida, and CNBC and MSNBC were both carrying Coogan's press conference live. Someone had turned on the wide-screen television on the back wall of the rented storefront, and Ida made herself walk back there, feeling like a woman being led to her execution.

John Coogan came out first. With his sharp jawline and brassy-blond pompadour, he looked like an Aryan Youth poster that had wished very hard to become a real boy. Ida's hands and knees both started trembling as he swaggered to the podium, his trademark smirk in place. She watched as his mouth moved, as he swept one arm out, inviting Marissa to the stage.

Her old bunkmate was still stylish in a black knee-length dress and with pearls at her neck and ears. Her hair was still long and shiny, her face still dimpled and pretty, although there were fine lines around her eyes. Marissa nodded at someone off camera, pressed a sheet of paper to the podium with shaking hands, and began.

“My name is Marissa Schuyler. I attended Camp Golden Hills in upstate New York from 2000 to 2004, from when I was twelve to when I was sixteen. Ida Berkowitz was my bunkmate the summer of 2004. That August, I accused Ida of stealing a bracelet my parents had sent me. I called the police and filed a report. John Coogan reached out to me through mutual friends because he found this police report and was planning on posting it on his social-media channels. He asked if I would be willing to answer some questions about the incident before he did so.”

Ida heard a staffer toward the back of the crowd mutter a quiet, “Fuck.”

She heard someone else quickly shush him. On the television screen, John Coogan was watching Marissa with a vulpine grin on his face. Ida's stomach felt like it was trying to contract in on itself. All the muscles in her legs and belly were clenched and trembling.

Marissa paused. Ida imagined a sword, hanging over her head, attached to a fraying rope that was just about to snap.

Marissa's voice trembled as she said, "I filed the report, but the truth is that the police should never have been involved. My accusation was the result of a misunderstanding." Her throat worked as she swallowed. "Ida was my friend. Ida borrowed my bracelet. She didn't steal it. This was a simple misunderstanding that should never have merited the police department's involvement. I had hoped this incident would stay in the past, where it belongs. But unfortunately, this turn of events has compelled me to speak. So let me say plainly: Ida Berkowitz did not steal anything from me." Marissa's hands were still shaking, but her gaze was direct. "When I knew Ida, she was a bright, accomplished, honest young woman, and I have no reason to believe that has changed. In my opinion, the people of New York would be lucky to have her serving as their senator." Marissa stood for a moment before taking her sheet of paper and walking off the stage, leaving Coogan behind, looking stunned.

"Well, that was a bit of a nothing-burger," the MSNBC newscaster said when the feed cut back to the studio. "Turning now to the latest congressional budget debates . . ."

In the back of the room, someone—maybe the same staffer who'd been cursing—whooped out loud. Dani pumped her fist. Ida felt her breath rushing out as Dani pointed at her phone's screen and murmured, "Coogan looks like he just shit himself." Ida looked. It was true that Coogan's smirk had been replaced by a sour expression. She knew she should have felt triumphant and relieved, and she did, but that wasn't all she was feeling. Her eyes were stinging, and her throat felt tight. *Ida was my friend*, she heard Marissa say. How could she have known how good it would feel to hear that, and how sad it made her feel to think that she could have had Marissa's friendship for all those years?

"Can you find me her phone number?" she asked Dani, who was standing beside her.

"You got it, boss," said Dani, and walked toward her desk. She was probably wondering if there was more to the story. Ida wondered if she'd

ever tell her.

Marissa picked up on the first ring, and her voice, low and husky, was just as Ida remembered. “Hello?”

Ida licked her lips. “Marissa? It’s Ida. My campaign director gave me your number. I hope it’s all right that I’m calling. I—I just . . .” *I want to thank you*, she’d been planning on saying, but Marissa started talking before she could get the words out.

“Ida. I’ve thought about you so many times, ever since the first time you ran for office. I can’t believe someone I knew from summer camp is actually in Congress.”

Marissa sounded breathless, almost starstruck. Ida made one of her practiced noncommittal noises. She wondered what Marissa’s politics really were, what Marissa actually thought about her. Ida hadn’t made a secret of her marriage to Frankie. It wasn’t a big deal in her deep-blue bubble, but she imagined it played much differently in Marissa’s circles.

“The thing is . . .” Marissa paused. Ida remembered the way she’d press her fingertips to her eyebrows when she was concentrating. “Okay. So John Coogan called me after he’d dug up the police report.” Marissa took another breath. “I said ‘no comment.’ But he had the report, and he said he was going to run with it. I told him I’d do a press conference if he’d give me some time. That way I could tell the story, and he wouldn’t be able to put words in my mouth.” She gulped. “I’m sorry. I wish I could have given you a heads-up so you’d know what I was going to say, but it all happened so fast, and I was worried he was just going to go ahead and post it. And I didn’t know how to reach you.”

“I’m very grateful. But . . .” Ida made herself say it. “Marissa, I did take your bracelet. Without your permission.”

“Yes, but you didn’t *steal* it,” Marissa said, as if this were perfectly evident. “I knew you didn’t steal it. You were going to give it back.” She said it not as a question but as a statement, with zero doubt creeping in around its edges, and in spite of all the trouble Marissa had caused her, and how Ida had spent the last sixteen hours trying to figure out what would happen if she lost the election and what jobs were available to a disgraced former congresswoman, Ida felt weak-kneed with gratitude. “I told John, but he said that clearly the police had taken it seriously, and I said . . .” Marissa’s voice

cracked. Ida waited.

“I told him I was ashamed of myself. I said I was embarrassed about the whole thing.”

“You and me both,” Ida said softly. She took a breath. “I was so jealous of you that summer.”

“You—you were . . .” Marissa sounded stunned. “Why? Why were you possibly jealous of me?” Before Ida could answer, Marissa kept talking. “Ida, you were so smart! You were the smartest person any of us had ever met. We all used to talk about it. How you’d be president, or something, and we’d be able to tell people that we knew you when.”

There was an aching lump in Ida’s throat. “I guess it was mostly the prizes. The things your parents were sending you.” She swallowed hard. “I could tell how much they loved you. And my mom . . .” Another swallow. “You know. Not so much with her.”

“Oh, God.” Marissa sounded both disgusted and amused. “You mean the bribes?” Ida could picture Marissa’s dimples flashing in a rueful smile. “It was just jewelry then, right? God. By the time I was in college, rushing my mom’s sorority, they were offering me a thousand bucks for every ten pounds I lost.” She lowered her voice. “I would have paid them if they’d have just left me alone.” She paused. “And I do remember how bad things were, with you and your mom. I’m sorry if I was insensitive.”

Ida didn’t know what to say. She’d never thought about the earrings and the bracelets and the diamond studs as anything but desirable. No more than she’d imagined Marissa being envious of her, or having her own troubles, her own sorrows. All she’d been able to see were all her bunkmate’s possessions, her parents’ love, all the things Ida had wanted and could never have.

“I’m sorry,” Marissa was saying, again. “I’m sorry for the trouble I caused you.”

It’s over, Ida realized. She felt her chest unclench, her lungs expand, her body go loose and warm. She said mildly, “Well, Donovan Coe was extremely hot.”

There was a brief pause. Then Marissa laughed a little. “God, wasn’t he, though?”

“Like a young Brando,” said Ida.

“Or Leonardo DiCaprio,” said Marissa. “Are you guys still in touch?”

“Oh, no,” Ida said. “It wasn’t ever like that. It was very sweet while it lasted, but we never even tried to do a long-distance thing.” She found that

she was smiling. “I just had six weeks of kisses by the dumpster.”

“Young love,” said Marissa, who sounded like she was smiling, too.

“Yeah. I barely noticed the smell.”

“He’s on Instagram,” said Marissa, quickly adding, “Don’t look. He’s lost all his hair.”

“Oh no! That beautiful hair!” Ida paused. “And you’re married, right? And still in Chicago?”

“Evanston,” Marissa said, sounding, again, a little shy. “My husband and I have two daughters. Six-year-old twins.”

“Wow.”

“My mother said God is punishing me for what I put her through.” Marissa laughed a little. “They’re good girls, though. You—I know you’re married, but no kids, right?”

“No kids. Maybe someday. Marissa . . .” Ida paused, licking her lips. “Can you forgive me?”

“Only if you forgive me, too,” Marissa said. “I’m sorry that I filed the police report. It was an awful thing to do.” In a very small voice, she added, “And I’m sorry I said we weren’t friends. I was hurt and angry, and it wasn’t true.” She paused, and Ida heard her inhaling. “The truth was, I was proud to be your friend.”

“Thank you,” Ida said. She was thinking of how lucky she’d been, of all the help she’d gotten, of how every time she thought the oil was used up, she found that there was just enough left to light her way. How even a distant, critical, not especially loving mother had been, in some ways, a gift. Zoe had lit the fire that had burned beneath her daughter, fueling Ida’s hard work and her ambition. Other girls might have gotten earrings and bracelets. Ida had gotten her drive and eventually her career and her future. Marissa might have been lucky, but Ida was lucky, too. “Of course I forgive you.”

That afternoon, Ida issued a statement accepting Marissa’s apology.

Nine days later, Ida was elected by the largest margin with which a Democrat had won a Senate seat in forty years.

The morning after Election Day, a package arrived at her apartment. Frankie was in the kitchen with Ida when she opened the box and saw, on a square of cotton batting, a rose-gold Chanel bangle, a twin of the one she’d taken all those years ago.

“Oh, it’s engraved!” Frankie held the bracelet up to the light. Ida read the inscription out loud, blinking away tears, thinking about how lucky she was, thinking about good deeds and good fortune and unearned grace. The date of the election was there, along with the words *To Senator Ida Berkowitz from Marissa Schuyler. Always your friend.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Jennifer Weiner is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of nineteen novels, including *The Summer Place*, *That Summer*, and *In Her Shoes*, as well as short stories, essays, and nonfiction. Her work has also appeared in the *New York Times*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *Redbook*, among many others.

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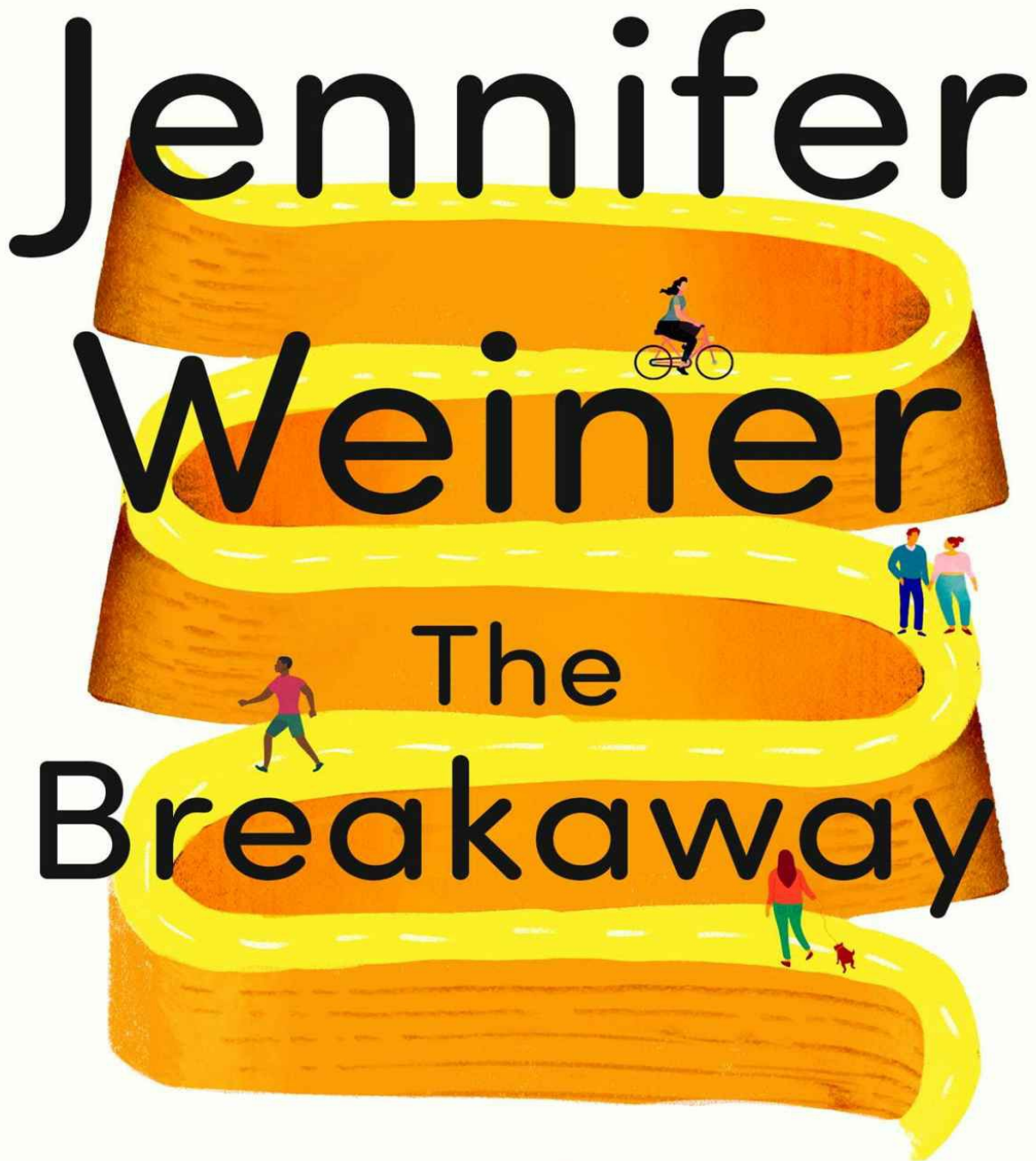
Jennifer

Weiner

The

Breakaway

A NOVEL



The Breakaway from Jennifer Weiner is a warmhearted and empowering new novel about love, family, friendship, secrets, and the power of a trip to change your life.