

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Jennifer Weiner

GOOD IN BED

A NOVEL



"This season's beach-book
Queen for a Day."
—Janet Maslin,
The New York Times

Good in Bed

a novel

JENNIFER WEINER



WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS

New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore

The sale of this book without its cover is unauthorized. If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that it was reported to the publisher as "unsold and destroyed." Neither the author nor the publisher has received payment for the sale of this "stripped book."

WSP Washington Square Press
n 1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

"Home is so sad" and "This Be the Verse" from *Collected Poems* by Philip Larkin. Copyright © 1988, 1989 by the Estate of Philip Larkin. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

Lyrics from "Suzie Lightning" by Warren Zevon. Copyright © 1991, Giant Music Publishing. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Copyright © 2001 by Jennifer Weiner

Originally published in hardcover in 2001 by Pocket Books

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address Washington Square Press, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-7434-1817-4

First Washington Square Press trade paperback printing April 2002

30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22

WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-800-456-6798 or business@simonandschuster.com

Cover design and illustration by Honi Werner

Printed in the U.S.A.

Praise for Jennifer Weiner's *GOOD IN BED*

"A fresh, funny look at a woman who conquers her obsessions with food, figure, family, and finding a nice Jewish boy—with wit and style."

—*Glamour*

"An unpredictable and impressive debut . . . a fresh look at the miseries visited on women by their lovers, fathers, and themselves."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Witty and original . . . a must-read."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Weiner's debut shines. . . . *Good in Bed* offers a sensitive telling of a life familiar to many and a humorous take on how the struggle can end in joy."

—The Associated Press

"Wildly funny and surprisingly tender . . . a truly original story."

—John Searles, *Cosmopolitan*

"In rollicking prose, and with an ever-expanding cast of kooky characters, Weiner sends her heroine through the circles of comic hell."

—Marion Wink, *Newsday*

"Anyone who's ever had a bad case of the 'if-onlies'—'If only I could lose ten pounds . . . ,' 'If only I could sell my screenplay . . . '—should love this tale of one young woman, all of whose 'if-onlies' come true, if not quite in the way she had imagined, thanks to her sense of humor and relentless ambition."

—*The Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ)

"Funny and unflinchingly honest, *Good in Bed* is a powerhouse debut for Jennifer Weiner." —Valerie Frankel, author of *Smart vs. Pretty*

"Curvy and nervy . . . a must read." —Susan Segrest, *Mode*

"*Good in Bed* is as tempting as a bowl of crunchy caramel popcorn, offering a modicum of diversion for the mind and a bit of substance for the rooting heart. Weiner writes colorfully. She makes you turn the pages to find out what misadventures will next befall the heroine. Ultimately, Cannie is a character to care about."

—*Boston Herald*

"A delightful romp." —*Lexington Herald-Leader*

"A fast, funny, surprisingly moving tale." —*Philadelphia* magazine

"Warmhearted . . . funny and smart." —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"A breezy, sweetly oddball urban fairy tale. . . . Jennifer Weiner endows Cannie's story with a lot of brassy heart."

—*The Miami Herald*

"Often hilarious. . . . In less able hands, Weiner's message of self-empowerment might seem too earnest, but here it's thrilling to see Cannie learn to love a larger woman—herself."

—*US* magazine

"It is difficult for any author, let alone a new novelist, to take themes as strong as abandonment, loyalty, self-esteem and sisterhood, lace them through a gripping plot, and sprinkle them with humor. Jennifer Weiner has managed to do just that in her delicious debut novel."

—United Press International

"Succulent. A compelling romp with surprising warmth."

—Suzanne Finnamore, author of *Otherwise Engaged*

"A fresh, funny feast of a novel. . . . Jennifer Weiner is a talented writer and *Good in Bed* is a delight."

—Anna Maxted, author of *Getting Over It*

"Smart and important . . . addresses issues of success, size, sex, and relationships, all while being a fast, fun read and consistently ringing true."

—*Philadelphia City Paper*

"Get yourself into beach-reading mode with this lightly written debut novel about a zaftig young reporter who learns to love her plus-size self."

—*People*

"Having your sex life exposed to a national audience would be painful enough, but being called fat in front of the whole world? Grounds for murder. Happily, instead of giving Cannie an Uzi, Jennifer Weiner has armed her protagonist with a wicked smart mouth, unflinching honesty, and incredible good luck."

—Rebecca Pepper Sinkler, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

For my family

Home is so sad. It stays as it was left,
Shaped to the comfort of the last to go
As if to win them back. Instead, bereft
Of anyone to please, it withers so,
Having no heart to put aside the theft
And turn again to what it started as,
A joyous shot at how things ought to be,
Long fallen wide. You can see how it was:
Look at the pictures and the cutlery.
The music in the piano stool. That vase.

—Philip Larkin

Love is nothing, nothing, nothing like they say.

—Liz Phair

PART ONE

Good in Bed

ONE

"Have you seen it?" asked Samantha.

I leaned close to my computer so my editor wouldn't hear me on a personal call.

"Seen what?"

"Oh, nothing. Never mind. We'll talk when you get home."

"Seen what?" I asked again.

"Nothing," Samantha repeated.

"Samantha, you have never once called me in the middle of the day about nothing. Now come on. Spill."

Samantha sighed. "Okay, but remember: Don't shoot the messenger."

Now I was getting worried.

"*Moxie*. The new issue. Cannie, you have to go get one right now."

"Why? What's up? Am I one of the Fashion Faux Pas?"

"Just go to the lobby and get it. I'll hold."

This was important. Samantha was, in addition to being my best friend, also an associate at Lewis, Dommel, and Fenick. Samantha put people on hold, or had her assistant tell them she was in a meeting. Samantha herself did not hold. "It's a sign of weakness," she'd told me. I felt a small twinge of anxiety work its way down my spine.

I took the elevator to the lobby of the *Philadelphia Examiner*, waved at the security guard, and walked to the small newsstand, where I found *Moxie* on the rack next to its sister publications, *Cosmo* and *Glamour* and *Mademoiselle*. It was hard to miss, what with the super-model in sequins beneath headlines blaring "Come Again: Multiple Orgasm Made Easy!" and "Ass-Tastic! Four Butt Blasters to Get your Rear in Gear!" After a quick minute of deliberation, I grabbed a small bag of chocolate M&M's, paid the gum-chomping cashier, and went back upstairs.

Samantha was still holding. "Page 132," she said.

I sat, eased a few M&M's into my mouth, and flipped to page 132, which turned out to be "Good in Bed," *Moxie*'s regular male-written feature designed to help the average reader understand what her boyfriend was up to . . . or wasn't up to, as the case might be. At first my eyes wouldn't make sense of the letters. Finally, they unscrambled. "Loving a Larger Woman," said the headline, "By Bruce Guberman." Bruce Guberman had been my boyfriend for just over three years, until we'd decided to take a break three months ago. And the Larger Woman, I could only assume, was me.

You know how in scary books a character will say, "I felt my heart stop?" Well, I did. Really. Then I felt it start to pound again, in my wrists, my throat, my fingertips. The hair at the back of my neck stood up. My hands felt icy. I could hear the blood roaring in my ears, as I read the first line of the article: "I'll never forget the day I found out my girlfriend weighed more than I did."

Samantha's voice sounded like it was coming from far, far away. "Cannie? Cannie, are you there?"

"I'll kill him!" I choked.

"Take deep breaths," Samantha counseled. "In through the nose, out through the mouth."

Betsy, my editor, cast a puzzled look across the partition that separated our desks. "*Are you all right?*" she mouthed. I squeezed my eyes shut. My headset had somehow landed on the carpet. "Breathe!" I could hear Samantha say, her voice a tinny echo from the floor. I was wheezing, gasping. I could feel chocolate and bits of candy shell on

my teeth. I could see the quote they'd lifted, in bold-faced pink letters that screamed out from the center of the page. "Loving a larger woman," Bruce had written, "is an act of courage in our world."

"I can't believe this! I can't believe he did this! I'll kill him!"

By now Betsy had circled around to my desk and was trying to peer over my shoulder at the magazine in my lap, and Gabby, my evil coworker, was looking our way, her beady brown eyes squinting for signs of trouble, thick fingers poised over her keyboard so that she could instantly e-mail the bad news to her pals. I slammed the magazine closed. I took a successful deep breath, and waved Betsy back to her seat.

Samantha was waiting. "You didn't know?"

"Didn't know what? That he thought dating me was an act of courage?" I attempted a sardonic snort. "He should try *being* me."

"So you didn't know he got a job at *Moxie*."

I flipped to the front, where Contributors were listed in thumbnail profiles beneath arty black-and-white head shots. And there was Bruce, with his shoulder-length hair blowing in what was assuredly artificial wind. He looked, I thought uncharitably, like Yanni. "'Good in Bed' columnist Bruce Guberman joins the staff of *Moxie* this month. A free-lance writer from New Jersey, Guberman is currently at work on his first novel."

"His first *novel*?" I said. Well, shrieked, maybe. Heads turned. Over the partition, Betsy was looking worried again, and Gabby had started typing. "That lying sack of shit!"

"I didn't know he was writing a novel," said Samantha, no doubt desperate to change the subject.

"He can barely write a thank-you note," I said, flipping back to page 132.

"I never thought of myself as a chubby chaser," I read. "But when I met C., I fell for her wit, her laugh, her sparkling eyes. Her body, I decided, was something I could learn to live with."

"I'LL KILL HIM!"

"So kill him already and shut up about it," muttered Gabby, shoving her inch-thick glasses up her nose.

Betsy was on her feet again, and my hands were shaking, and suddenly somehow there were M&M's all over the floor, crunching beneath the rollers of my chair.

"I gotta go," I told Samantha, and hung up.

"I'm fine," I said to Betsy. She gave me a worried look, then retreated.

It took me three tries to get Bruce's number right, and when his voice mail calmly informed me that he wasn't available to take my call, I lost my nerve, hung up, and called Samantha back.

"Good in bed, my ass," I said. "I ought to call his editor. It's false advertising. I mean, did they check his references? Nobody called me."

"That's the anger talking," said Samantha. Ever since she started dating her yoga instructor, she's become very philosophical.

"Chubby chaser?" I said. I could feel tears prickling behind my eyelids. "How could he do this to me?"

"Did you read the whole thing?"

"Just the first little bit."

"Maybe you better not read any more."

"It gets worse?"

Samantha sighed. "Do you really want to know?"

"No. Yes. No." I waited. Samantha waited. "Yes. Tell me."

Samantha sighed again. "He calls you. . . . Lewinsky-esque."

"With regards to my body or my blow jobs?" I tried to laugh, but it came out as a strangled sob.

"And he goes on and on about your . . . let me find it. Your 'amplitude.' "

"Oh, God."

"He said you were succulent," Samantha said helpfully. "And zaftig. That's not a bad word, is it?"

"God, the whole time we went out, he never said anything . . ."

"You dumped him. He's mad at you," said Samantha.

"I didn't dump him!" I cried. "We were just taking a break! And he agreed that it was a good idea!"

"Well, what else could he do?" asked Samantha. "You say, 'I think we need some time apart,' and he either agrees with you and walks away

clinging to whatever shreds of dignity he's got left, or begs you not to leave him, and looks pathetic. He chose the dignity cling."

I ran my hands through my chin-length brown hair and tried to gauge the devastation. Who else had seen this? Who else knew that C. was me? Had he shown all his friends? Had my sister seen it? Had, God forbid, my mother?

"I gotta go," I told Samantha again. I set down my headset and got to my feet, surveying the *Philadelphia Examiner* newsroom—dozens of mostly middle-aged, mostly white people, tapping away at their computers, or clustered around the television sets watching CNN.

"Does anybody know anything about getting a gun in this state?" I inquired of the room at large.

"We're working on a series," said Larry the city editor—a small, bearded, perplexed-looking man who took everything absolutely seriously. "But I think the laws are pretty lenient."

"There's a two-week waiting period," piped up one of the sports reporters.

"That's only if you're under twenty-five," added an assistant features editor.

"You're thinking of rental cars," said the sports guy scornfully.

"We'll get back to you, Cannie," said Larry. "Are you in a rush?"

"Kind of." I sat down, then stood back up again. "Pennsylvania has the death penalty, right?"

"We're working on a series," Larry said without smiling.

"Oh, never mind," I said, and sat back down and called Samantha again.

"You know what? I'm not going to kill him. Death's too good for him."

"Whatever you want," Samantha said loyally.

"Come with me tonight? We'll ambush him in his parking lot."

"And do what?"

"I'll figure that out between now and then," I said.

I had met Bruce Guberman at a party, in what felt like a scene from somebody else's life. I'd never met a guy at a social gathering who'd

been so taken with me that he actually asked me for a date on the spot. My typical m.o. is to wear down their resistance with my wit, my charm, and usually a home-cooked dinner starring kosher chicken with garlic and rosemary. Bruce did not require a chicken. Bruce was easy.

I was stationed in the corner of the living room, where I had a good view of the room, plus easy access to the hot artichoke dip. I was doing my best imitation of my mother's life partner, Tanya, trying to eat an Alaskan king crab leg with her arm in a sling. So the first time I saw Bruce, I had one of my arms jammed against my chest, sling-style, and my mouth wide open, and my neck twisted at a particularly grotesque angle as I tried to suck the imaginary meat out of the imaginary claw. I was just getting to the part where I accidentally jammed the crab leg up my right nostril, and I think there might have been hot artichoke dip on my cheek, when Bruce walked up. He was tall, and tanned, with a goatee and a dirty-blond ponytail, and soft brown eyes.

"Um, excuse me," he said, "are you okay?"

I raised my eyebrows at him. "Fine."

"You just looked kind of . . ." His voice—a nice voice, if a little high—trailed off.

"Weird?"

"I saw somebody having a stroke once," he told me. "It started off like that."

By now my friend Brianna had collected herself. Wiping her eyes, she grabbed his hand. "Bruce, this is Cannie," she said. "Cannie was just doing an imitation."

"Oh," said Bruce, and stood there, obviously feeling foolish.

"Not to worry," I said. "It's a good thing you stopped me. I was being unkind."

"Oh," said Bruce again.

I kept talking. "See, I'm trying to be nicer. It's my New Year's resolution."

"It's February," he pointed out.

"I'm a slow starter."

"Well," he said, "at least you're trying." He smiled at me, and walked away.

I spent the rest of the party getting the scoop. He'd come with a guy Brianna knew from graduate school. The good news: He was a graduate student, which meant reasonably smart, and Jewish, just like me. He was twenty-seven. I was twenty-five. It fit. "He's funny, too," said Brianna, before delivering the bad news: Bruce had been working on his dissertation for three years, possibly longer, and he lived in central New Jersey, more than an hour away from us, picking up freelance writing work and teaching the occasional bunch of freshmen, subsisting on stipends, a small scholarship, and, mostly, his parents' money.

"Geographically undesirable," Brianna pronounced.

"Nice hands," I countered. "Nice teeth."

"He's a vegetarian," she said.

I winced. "For how long?"

"Since college."

"Hmph. Well, maybe I can work with it."

"He's . . ." Brianna trailed off.

"On parole?" I joked. "Addicted to painkillers?"

"Kind of immature," she finally said.

"He's a guy," I said, shrugging. "Aren't they all?"

She laughed. "And he's a good guy," she said. "Talk to him. You'll see."

That whole night, I watched him, and I felt him watching me. But he didn't say anything until after the party broke up, and I was walking home, feeling more than a little disappointed. It had been a while since I'd even seen someone who'd caught my fancy, and tall, nice hands, nice-white-teeth grad student Bruce appeared, at least from the outside, to be a possibility.

But when I heard footsteps behind me, I wasn't thinking about him. I was thinking what every woman who lives in a city thinks when she hears quick footsteps coming up behind her and it's after midnight and she's between streetlights. I took a quick glance at my surroundings while fumbling for the Mace attached to my keychain. There was a streetlight on the corner, a car parked underneath. I figured I'd Mace whoever it was into temporary immobility, smash one of the car windows, hoping the alarm would go off, scream bloody murder, and run.