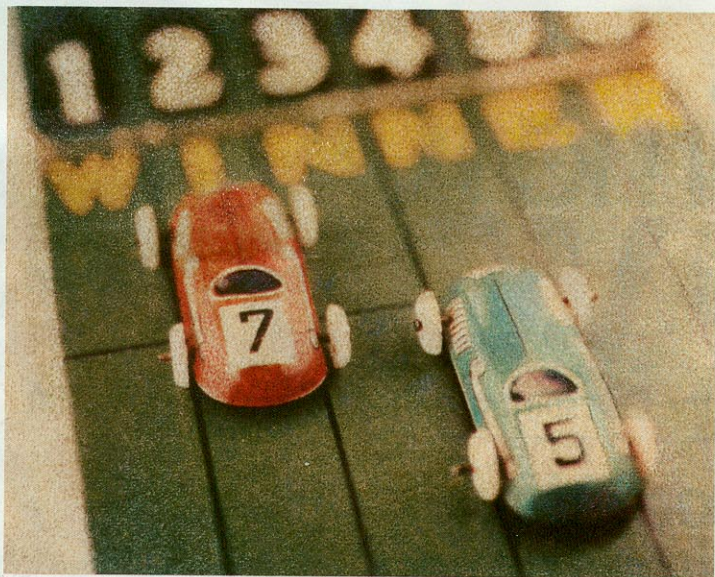


sweet victory

How far would I go to win?

by Jennifer Weiner



I WAS A YEAR AND A HALF INTO IT BEFORE

I learned that my marriage was based on a lie.

It happened like this: My husband casually asked if I wanted to be his teammate in our city's Urban Challenge, a scavenger hunt/footrace that's a local version of *The Amazing Race*.

I responded swiftly: Absolutely not. My husband is supercompetitive. So competitive that I have long refused to team up with him for so much as a game of Scrabble, lest we lose and he get grumpy. So competitive that he once finished a lazy day of inner-tubing down a river by paddling frantically to the shore, raising his tube above his head, and yelling, "I win!"

I knew how racing with him would end: with me cowed and sheepish, like all those wives on reality-TV competitions, cringing as my red-faced, bulgy-veined partner shouted at me to run faster, paddle harder, come on, hurry!

But somehow, Adam talked me into it. On the appointed morning, we won the trivia quiz that determined the starting order and set off at the front of the pack.

"Okay," Adam said. "I think we should...."

I squinted at a pair of smug, spandex-clad marathoners-in-training zipping past us. Suddenly, the idea of "no pressure, just fun" was out the window. I wanted—needed—to win.

I turned to my husband. "You're walking," I observed. "Why are you walking?"

He stared at me. "I thought we decided...."

"People are passing us! Run, goddammit!"

In seconds, I became the distilled essence of

every jerk you've ever seen on the small screen—or the soccer sidelines. I cajoled. I berated. I called my husband words I'd never previously said aloud. We eked out a 16th-place finish out of more than 100 teams, which wasn't bad—but the walk home wasn't pretty.

It's not hard to figure out why I'd always wanted to see my husband as the competitive one. For a guy, the words that describe the desire to be the best—hard charging, driven, ruthless—sound complimentary. Apply those same words to a woman, and suddenly she's Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*. So I preferred to think of success as something that had fallen into my lap; to say that I'd just been lucky, instead of admitting to the hard work (and occasional bad behavior) that my personal and professional victories required.

But the truth is that I have always wanted to win, whether "winning" meant getting the best grades in school, snagging the plum assignments at my newspaper, or coming in first in a just-for-fun footrace. For better or worse, my competitive nature has made me who I am.

Which doesn't mean I want to go through life snarling at my spouse or beating myself up for failing to be the swiftest, the strongest, the girl with the most cake. If it took me more than three decades to accept that I am a competitor, I suspect I'll spend the next few trying to channel my instincts for good instead of evil—and remembering that I should never race with (or, God forbid, *against*) my husband again. **R**

Jennifer Weiner's newest novel, *Certain Girls*, will be published this month by Atria.

