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The
**SEVEN
HUSBANDS**
of
**EVELYN
HUGO**

a novel

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THE
SEVEN HUSBANDS
OF
EVELYN HUGO

A Novel

TAYLOR JENKINS REID

ATRIA BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

For Lilah
Smash the patriarchy, sweetheart

Evelyn Hugo to Auction Off Gowns

BY PRIYA AMRIT

MARCH 2, 2017

Film legend and '60s It Girl Evelyn Hugo has just announced that she will auction off 12 of her most memorable gowns through Christie's to raise money for breast cancer research.

At the age of 79, Hugo has long been an icon of glamour and elegance. She is known for a personal style both sensual and restrained, and many of Hugo's most famous looks are considered touchstones of the fashion and Hollywood archives.

Those looking to own a piece of Hugo history will be intrigued not only by the gowns themselves but also by the context in which they were worn. Included in the sale will be the emerald-green Miranda La Conda that Hugo wore to the 1959 Academy Awards, the violet soufflé and organdy scoop-neck she donned at the premiere of *Anna Karenina* in 1962, and the navy-blue silk Michael Maddax that she was wearing in 1982 when she won her Oscar for *All for Us*.

Hugo has weathered her share of Hollywood scandals, not the least of which being her seven marriages, including her decades-long relationship with film producer Harry Cameron. The two Hollywood insiders shared a daughter, Connor Cameron, who is no doubt the influence for the auction. Ms. Cameron passed away last year from breast cancer soon after turning 41.

Born Evelyn Elena Herrera in 1938, the daughter of Cuban immigrants, Hugo grew up in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York

City. By 1955, she had made her way to Hollywood, gone blond, and been rechristened Evelyn Hugo. Almost overnight, Hugo became a member of the Hollywood elite. She remained in the spotlight for more than three decades before retiring in the late '80s and marrying financier Robert Jamison, older brother of three-time Oscar-winning actress Celia St. James. Now widowed from her seventh husband, Hugo resides in Manhattan.

Preternaturally beautiful and a paragon of glamour and daring sexuality, Hugo has long been a source of fascination for moviegoers the world over. This auction is expected to raise upward of \$2 million.



CAN YOU COME INTO MY office?”

I look around at the desks beside me and then back at Frankie, trying to confirm to whom, exactly, she’s talking. I point to myself. “Do you mean me?”

Frankie has very little patience. “Yes, Monique, you. That’s why I said, ‘Monique, can you come into my office?’”

“Sorry, I just heard the last part.”

Frankie turns. I grab my notepad and follow her.

There is something very striking about Frankie. I’m not sure that you’d say she was conventionally attractive—her features are severe, her eyes very wide apart—but she is nevertheless someone you can’t help but look at and admire. With her thin, six-foot-tall frame, her short-cropped Afro, and her affinity for bright colors and big jewelry, when Frankie walks into a room, everyone takes notice.

She was part of the reason I took this job. I have looked up to her since I was in journalism school, reading her pieces in the very pages of the magazine she now runs and I now work for. And if I’m being honest, there is something very inspiring about having a black woman running things. As a biracial woman myself—light brown skin and dark brown eyes courtesy of my black father, an abundance of face freckles courtesy of my white mother—Frankie makes me feel more sure that I can one day run things, too.

“Take a seat,” Frankie says as she sits down and gestures toward an orange chair on the opposite side of her Lucite desk.

I calmly sit and cross my legs. I let Frankie talk first.

“So, puzzling turn of events,” she says, looking at her computer. “Evelyn Hugo’s people are inquiring about a feature. An exclusive interview.”

My gut instinct is to say *Holy shit* but also *Why are you telling me this?* “About what in particular?” I ask.

“My guess is it’s related to the gown auction she’s doing,” Frankie says. “My understanding is that it’s very important to her to raise as much money for the American Breast Cancer Foundation as possible.”

“But they won’t confirm that?”

Frankie shakes her head. “All they will confirm is that Evelyn has something to say.”

Evelyn Hugo is one of the biggest movie stars of all time. She doesn’t even have to *have* something to say for people to listen.

“This could be a big cover for us, right? I mean, she’s a living legend. Wasn’t she married eight times or something?”

“Seven,” Frankie says. “And yes. This has huge potential. Which is why I hope you’ll bear with me through the next part of this.”

“What do you mean?”

Frankie takes a big breath and gets a look on her face that makes me think I’m about to get fired. But then she says, “Evelyn specifically requested you.”

“Me?” This is the second time in the span of five minutes that I have been shocked that someone was interested in speaking with me. I need to work on my confidence. Suffice it to say, it’s taken a beating recently. Although why pretend it was ever really soaring?

“To be honest, that was my reaction, too,” Frankie says.

Now *I’ll* be honest, I’m a little offended. Although, obviously, I can see where she’s coming from. I’ve been at *Vivant* for less than a year, mostly doing puff pieces. Before that, I was blogging for the *Discourse*, a current events and culture site that calls itself a newsmagazine but is, effectively, a blog with punchy headlines. I wrote mainly for the Modern Life section, covering trending topics and opinion pieces.

After years of freelancing, the *Discourse* gig was a lifesaver. But when *Vivant* offered me a job, I couldn’t help myself. I jumped at the chance to join an institution, to work among legends.

On my first day of work, I walked past walls decorated with iconic, culture-shifting covers—the one of women’s activist Debbie Palmer, naked and carefully posed, standing on top of a skyscraper overlooking Manhattan in 1984; the one of artist Robert Turner in the act of painting a canvas while the

text declared that he had AIDS, back in 1991. It felt surreal to be a part of the *Vivant* world. I have always wanted to see my name on its glossy pages.

But unfortunately, for the past twelve issues, I've done nothing but ask old-guard questions of people with old money, while my colleagues back at the *Discourse* are attempting to change the world while going viral. So, simply put, I'm not exactly impressed with myself.

"Look, it's not that we don't love you, we do," Frankie says. "We think you're destined for big things at *Vivant*, but I was hoping to put one of our more experienced, top hitters on this. And so I want to be up front with you when I say that we did not submit you as an idea to Evelyn's team. We sent five big names, and they came back with this."

Frankie turns her computer screen toward me and shows me an e-mail from someone named Thomas Welch, who I can only assume is Evelyn Hugo's publicist.

From: Thomas Welch
To: Troupe, Frankie
Cc: Stamey, Jason; Powers, Ryan

It's Monique Grant or Evelyn's out.

I look back up at Frankie, stunned. And to be honest, a little bit starstruck that Evelyn Hugo wants anything to do with me.

"Do you *know* Evelyn Hugo? Is that what's going on here?" Frankie asks me as she turns the computer back toward her side of the desk.

"No," I say, surprised even to be asked the question. "I've seen a few of her movies, but she's a little before my time."

"You have no personal connection to her?"

I shake my head. "Definitely not."

"Aren't you from Los Angeles?"

"Yeah, but the only way I'd have any connection to Evelyn Hugo, I suppose, is if my dad worked on one of her films back in the day. He was a still photographer for movie sets. I can ask my mom."

"Great. Thank you." Frankie looks at me expectantly.

"Did you want me to ask now?"

"Could you?"

I pull my phone out of my pocket and text my mother: *Did Dad ever work on any Evelyn Hugo movies?*

I see three dots start to appear, and I look up, only to find that Frankie is trying to get a glimpse of my phone. She seems to recognize the invasion and leans back.

My phone dings.

My mother texts: *Maybe? There were so many it's hard to keep track. Why?*

Long story, I reply, *but I'm trying to figure out if I have any connection to Evelyn Hugo. Think Dad would have known her?*

Mom answers: *Ha! No. Your father never hung out with anybody famous on set. No matter how hard I tried to get him to make us some celebrity friends.*

I laugh. "It looks like no. No connection to Evelyn Hugo."

Frankie nods. "OK, well, then, the other theory is that her people chose someone with less clout so that they could try to control you and, thus, the narrative."

I feel my phone vibrate again. *That reminds me that I wanted to send you a box of your dad's old work. Some gorgeous stuff. I love having it here, but I think you'd love it more. I'll send it this week.*

"You think they're preying on the weak," I say to Frankie.

Frankie smiles softly. "Sort of."

"So Evelyn's people look up the masthead, find my name as a lower-level writer, and think they can bully me around. That's the idea?"

"That's what I fear."

"And you're telling me this because . . ."

Frankie considers her words. "Because I don't think you can be bullied around. I think they are underestimating you. And I want this cover. I want it to make headlines."

"What are you saying?" I ask, shifting slightly in my chair.

Frankie claps her hands in front of her and rests them on the desk, leaning toward me. "I'm asking you if you have the guts to go toe-to-toe with Evelyn Hugo."

Of all the things I thought someone was going to ask me today, this would probably be somewhere around number nine million. Do I have the guts to go toe-to-toe with Evelyn Hugo? I have no idea.

"Yes," I say finally.

“That’s all? Just yes?”

I want this opportunity. I want to write this story. I’m sick of being the lowest one on the totem pole. And I need a win, goddammit. “Fuck yes?”

Frankie nods, considering. “Better, but I’m still not convinced.”

I’m thirty-five years old. I’ve been a writer for more than a decade. I want a book deal one day. I want to pick my stories. I want to eventually be the name people scramble to get when someone like Evelyn Hugo calls. And I’m being underused here at *Vivant*. If I’m going to get where I want to go, something has to let up. Someone has to get out of my way. And it needs to happen quickly, because this goddamn career is all I have anymore. If I want things to change, I have to change how I do things. And probably drastically.

“Evelyn wants me,” I say. “You want Evelyn. It doesn’t sound like I need to convince you, Frankie. It sounds like you need to convince *me*.”

Frankie is dead quiet, staring right at me over her steeped fingers. I was aiming for formidable. I might have overshot.

I feel the same way I did when I tried weight training and started with the forty-pound weights. Too much too soon makes it obvious you don’t know what you’re doing.

It takes everything I have not to take it back, not to apologize profusely. My mother raised me to be polite, to be demure. I have long operated under the idea that civility is subservience. But it hasn’t gotten me very far, that type of kindness. The world respects people who think they should be running it. I’ve never understood that, but I’m done fighting it. I’m here to be Frankie one day, maybe bigger than Frankie. To do big, important work that I am proud of. To leave a mark. And I’m nowhere near doing that yet.

The silence is so long that I think I might crack, the tension building with every second that goes by. But Frankie cracks first.

“OK,” she says, and puts out her hand as she stands up.

Shock and searing pride run through me as I extend my own. I make sure my handshake is strong; Frankie’s is a vise.

“Ace this, Monique. For us and for yourself, please.”

“I will.”

We break away from each other as I walk toward her door. “She might have read your physician-assisted suicide piece for the *Discourse*,” Frankie says just before I leave the room.

“What?”

“It was stunning. Maybe that’s why she wants you. It’s how we found you. It’s a great story. Not just because of the hits it got but because of you, because it’s beautiful work.”

It was one of the first truly meaningful stories I wrote of my own volition. I pitched it after I was assigned a piece on the rise in popularity of microgreens, especially on the Brooklyn restaurant scene. I had gone to the Park Slope market to interview a local farmer, but when I confessed that I didn’t get the appeal of mustard greens, he told me that I sounded like his sister. She had been highly carnivorous until the past year, when she switched to a vegan, all-organic diet as she battled brain cancer.

As we spoke more, he told me about a physician-assisted suicide support group he and his sister had joined, for those at the end of their lives and their loved ones. So many in the group were fighting for the right to die with dignity. Healthy eating wasn’t going to save his sister’s life, and neither of them wanted her to suffer any longer than she had to.

I knew then that I wanted, very deeply, to give a voice to the people of that support group.

I went back to the *Discourse* office and pitched the story. I thought I’d be turned down, given my recent slate of articles about hipster trends and celebrity think pieces. But to my surprise, I was greeted with a green light.

I worked tirelessly on it, attending meetings in church basements, interviewing the members, writing and rewriting, until I felt confident that the piece represented the full complexity—both the mercy and the moral code—of helping to end the lives of suffering people.

It is the story I am proudest of. I have, more than once, gone home from a day’s work here and read that piece again, reminding myself of what I’m capable of, reminding myself of the satisfaction I take in sharing the truth, no matter how difficult it may be to swallow.

“Thank you,” I tell Frankie now.

“I’m just saying that you’re talented. It might be that.”

“It’s probably not, though.”

“No,” she says. “It’s probably not. But write this story well, whatever it is, and then next time it will be.”

Evelyn Hugo's Coming Clean

BY JULIA SANTOS

MARCH 4, 2017

Word on the street is siren/LIVING LEGEND/world's most beautiful blonde Evelyn Hugo is auctioning off gowns *and* agreeing to an interview, which she has not done in multiple decades.

PLEASE tell me she is finally ready to talk about all those damn husbands. (I can understand four, maybe even five, six if you are really pushing it, but seven? Seven husbands? Not to mention the fact that we all know she was having an affair with Congressman Jack Easton in the early '80s. Girl. Got. A. Round.)

If she won't come clean about the husbands, let's pray she at least goes on the record about how she got those eyebrows. I mean, SHARE THE WEALTH, EVELYN.

When you see pictures of E back in the day with her brassy blond hair, those dark, straight-as-an-arrow eyebrows, that deep-tanned skin, and those golden-brown eyes, you have no choice but to stop what you are doing and stare right at her.

And don't even get me started on that body.

No ass, no hips—just huge boobs on a slim frame.

I have basically been working my entire adult life for a body like that. (Note: Am very far away. Might be the spaghetti bucatini I've been eating for lunch every day this week.)

Here is the only part that has me heated: Evelyn could have chosen anyone for this.

(Ahem, me?) But instead she chose some newbie at *Vivant*? She could have had anyone. (Ahem, me?) Why this Monique Grant chick (and not me)? Ugh, fine. I'm just bitter it's not me. I should really get a job at *Vivant*. They get all the good stuff.

COMMENTS:

Hihello565 says: Even people at *Vivant* don't want to work at *Vivant* anymore. Corporate overlords producing censored advertiser courting bullshit.

Ppppppppppps reply to Hihello565: Yeah, OK. Something tells me if the most well-respected, sophisticated magazine in the country offered you a job, you'd take it.

EChristine999 says: Didn't Evelyn's daughter die of cancer recently? I feel like I read something recently about that. So heartbreaking. BTW, that picture of Evelyn at Harry Cameron's grave? Basically ruined me for months. Beautiful family. So sad that she lost them.

MrsJeanineGrambs says: I do not care about Evelyn Hugo AT ALL. STOP WRITING ABOUT THESE PEOPLE. Her marriages, affairs, and most of her movies just go to prove one thing: Slut. Three A.M. was a disgrace to women. Focus your attention on people that deserve it.

SexyLexi89 says: Evelyn Hugo is maybe the most beautiful woman of all time. That shot in *Boute-en-Train* where she's coming out of the water naked and the camera cuts to black right before you see her nipples? So good.

PennyDriverKLM says: All hail Evelyn Hugo for making blond hair and dark eyebrows THE LOOK. Evelyn, I salute you.

YuppiePigs3 says: Too skinny! Not for me.

EvelynHugolsASaint says: This is a woman who has donated MILLIONS OF DOLLARS to charities for battered women's organizations and LGBTQ+ interests, and now she's auctioning off gowns for cancer research and all you can talk about is her eyebrow game? Seriously?

JuliaSantos@TheSpill reply to EvelynHugolsASaint: This is a fair point, I guess. SORRY. In my defense, she started making millions by being a badass business bitch back in the '60s. And she would never have had the clout to do that without her talent and beauty, and she never would have been as beautiful without DEM BROWS. But OK, fair point.