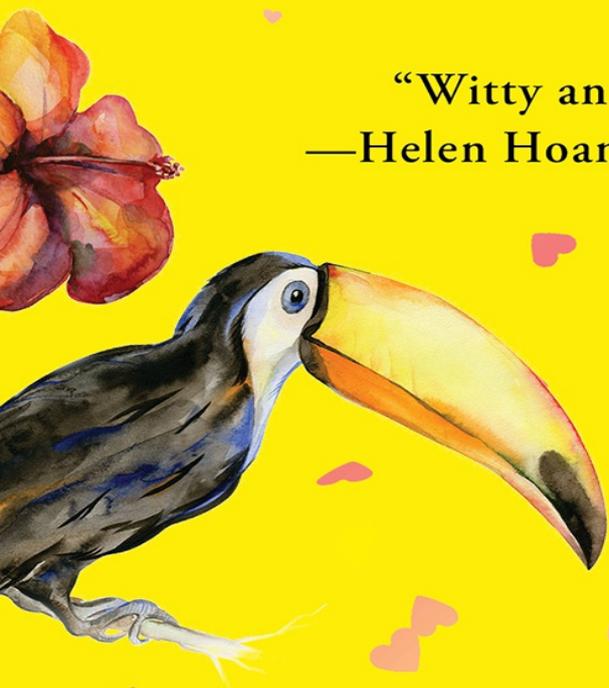
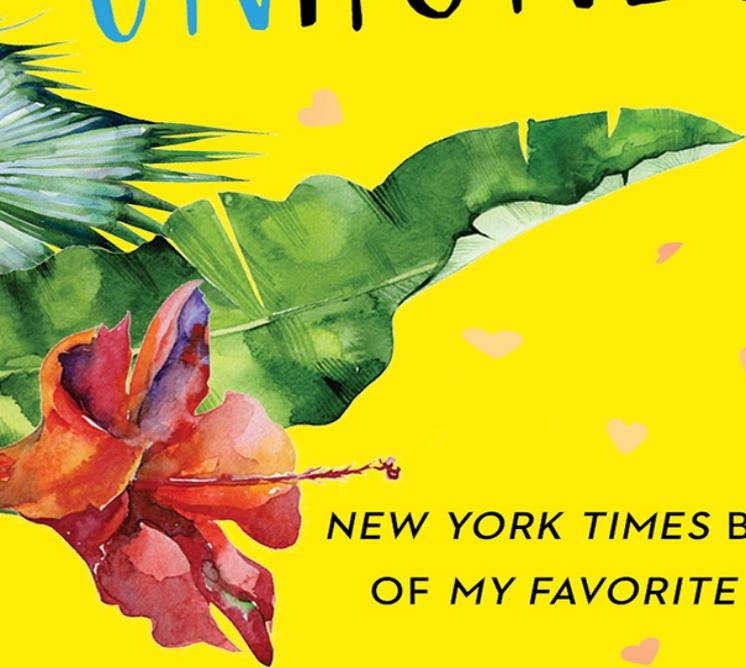


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—Helen Hoang, author of *The Bride Test*



THE UNHONEYMOONERS



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CHRISTINA LAUREN



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“Delightful.”

—*People* on *Roomies*

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—*Washington Post* on *Dating You / Hating You* (A Best Romance of 2017 selection)

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—*Kirkus Reviews* on *Dating You / Hating You* (starred review)

“Christina Lauren hilariously depicts modern dating.”

—*Us Weekly* on *Dating You / Hating You*

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THE
UNHONEYMOONERS

CHRISTINA
LAUREN



GALLERY BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

*For Hugues de Saint Vincent. Work like a captain, play
like a pirate.*

chapter one

In the calm before the storm—in this case, the blessed quiet before the bridal suite is overrun by the wedding party—my twin sister stares critically down at a freshly painted shell-pink fingernail and says, “I bet you’re relieved I’m not a bridezilla.” She glances across the room at me and smiles generously. “I bet you expected me to be *impossible*.”

It is a statement so perfectly dropped in the moment, I want to take a picture and frame it. I share a knowing look with our cousin Julieta, who is repainting Ami’s toes (“It should be more petal pink than baby pink, don’t you think?”), and gesture to the bodice of Ami’s wedding gown—which hangs from a satin hanger and on which I am presently and painstakingly ensuring that every sequin is lying flat. “Define ‘bridezilla.’”

Ami meets my eyes again, this time with a half-hearted glare. She’s in her fancy wedding-bra contraption and skimpy underwear that I’m aware—with some degree of sibling nausea—her dudebro fiancé, Dane, will positively destroy later. Her makeup is tastefully done and her fluffy veil is pinned in her upswept dark hair. It’s jarring. I mean, we’re used to looking identical while knowing we’re wholly different people inside, but this is something entirely unfamiliar: Ami is the portrait of a bride. Her life suddenly bears no resemblance to mine whatsoever.

“I’m not a bridezilla,” she argues. “I’m a perfectionist.”

I find my list and hold it aloft, waving it to catch her attention. It’s a piece of heavy, scalloped-edged pink stationery that has *Olive’s To-Do List—Wedding Day Edition* written in meticulous calligraphy at the top, and which includes seventy-four (*seventy-four*) items ranging from *Check for symmetry of the sequins on the bridal gown* to *Remove any wilted petals from the table arrangements*.

Each bridesmaid has her own list, perhaps not quite as long as my maid-of-honor one but equally fancy and handwritten. Ami even drew checkboxes so that we can record when each task is completed.

“Some people might call these lists a little overboard,” I say.

“Those are the same ‘some people,’” she replies, “who’ll pay an arm and a leg for a wedding that is half as nice.”

“Right. They hire a wedding planner to—” I refer to my list. “Wipe condensation off the chairs a half hour before the ceremony.”

Ami blows across her fingernails to dry them and lets out a movie-villain laugh. “Fools.”

You know what they say about self-fulfilling prophecies, I’m sure. Winning makes you feel like a winner, and then somehow . . . you keep winning. It has to be true, because Ami wins everything. She tossed a ticket into a raffle bowl at a street fair and walked home with a set of community theater tickets. She slid her business card into a cup at The Happy Gnome and won free happy hour beers for a year. She’s won makeovers, books, movie premiere tickets, a lawnmower, endless T-shirts, and even a car. Of course, she also won the stationery and calligraphy set she used to write the to-do lists.

All this to say, as soon as Dane Thomas proposed, Ami saw it as a challenge to spare our parents the cost of the wedding. As it happens, Mom and Dad could afford to contribute—they are messy in many ways, but financially is not one of them—but for Ami, getting out of paying for anything is the best kind of game. If pre-engagement Ami thought of contests as a competitive sport, *engaged* Ami viewed them as the Olympics.

No one in our enormous family was surprised, then, when she successfully planned a posh wedding with two hundred guests, a seafood buffet, a chocolate fountain, and multicolored roses spilling out of every jar, vase, and goblet—and has shelled out, at most, a thousand dollars. My sister works her ass off to find the best promotions and contests. She reposts every Twitter and Facebook giveaway she can find, and even has an email address that is aptly named *AmeliaTorresWins@xmail.com*.

Finally convinced there are no misbehaving sequins, I lift the hanger from where it’s suspended from a metal hook attached to the wall, intending to bring the gown to her.

But as soon as I touch it, my sister and cousin scream in unison, and Ami holds up her hands, her matte pink lips in a horrified O.

“Leave it there, Ollie,” she says. “I’ll come over. With your luck, you’ll trip and fall into the candle and it’ll go up in a ball of sequin-scented flames.”

I don’t argue: she isn’t wrong.

• • •

WHEREAS AMI IS A FOUR-LEAF clover, I have always been unlucky. I don’t say that to be theatrical or because I only seem unlucky in comparison; it is an objective truth. Google Olive Torres, Minnesota, and you’ll find dozens of articles and comment threads dedicated to the time I climbed into one of those claw crane arcade games and got stuck. I was six, and when the stuffed animal I’d captured didn’t drop directly into the chute, I decided to go in and get it.

I spent two hours inside the machine, surrounded by a lot of hard, coarse-furred, chemical-smelling toy bears. I remember looking out through the handprint-smudged plexiglass and seeing an array of frantic faces shouting muffled orders to each other. Apparently, when the owners of the arcade explained to my parents that they didn’t actually own the game and therefore didn’t have the key to get inside, the Edina fire department was called, followed quickly by a local news crew, who diligently documented my extraction.

Fast-forward twenty-six years and—thank you, YouTube—there’s still video floating around. To date, nearly five hundred thousand people have watched it and discovered that I was stubborn enough to climb in, and unlucky enough to catch my belt loop on the way out, leaving my pants behind with the bears.

This is but one story of many. So yes, Ami and I are identical twins—we are both five foot four with dark hair that misbehaves when there’s even a hint of humidity, deep brown eyes, upturned noses, and matching constellations of freckles—but that’s where the similarities end.

Our mother always tried to embrace our differences so we’d feel like individuals rather than a matching set. I know her intentions were good, but for as long as I can remember, our roles were set: Ami is an optimist who looks for the silver lining; I tend to assume the sky is falling. When we were three, Mom even dressed us as Care Bears for Halloween: Ami was Funshine Bear. I was Grumpy.

And it's clear the self-fulfilling prophecy works in both directions: From the moment I watched myself picking my nose behind a piece of grimy plexiglass on the six o'clock news, my luck never really improved. I've never won a coloring contest or an office pool; not even a lottery ticket or a game of Pin the Tail on the Donkey. I have, however, broken a leg when someone fell backward down the stairs and knocked me over (they walked away unscathed), consistently drew bathroom duty during every extended family vacation for a five-year stretch, was peed on by a dog while sunbathing in Florida, have been crapped on by innumerable birds over the years, and when I was sixteen I was struck by lightning—yes, really—and lived to tell the tale (but had to go to summer school because I missed two weeks of classes at the end of the year). Ami likes to sunnily remind me that I once guessed the correct number of shots left in a half-empty bottle of tequila.

But after drinking most of them in celebratory glee and subsequently throwing it all back up again, that win didn't feel particularly fortunate.

• • •

AMI REMOVES THE (FREE) DRESS from the hanger and steps into it just as our mother comes into the room from her (also free) adjoining suite. She gasps so dramatically when she sees Ami in the gown, I'm sure both Ami and I share the thought: *Olive somehow managed to stain the wedding dress.*

I inspect it to make sure I haven't.

All clear, Ami exhales, motioning for me to *carefully* zip her up. “*Mami*, you scared the crap out of us.”

With a head full of enormous Velcro rollers, a half-finished glass of (you guessed it: free) champagne in hand, and her lips thick with red gloss, Mom is managing an impressive impersonation of Joan Crawford. If Joan Crawford had been born in Guadalajara. “Oh, *mijita*, you look beautiful.”

Ami glances up at her, smiles, and then seems to remember—with immediate separation anxiety—the list she left all the way across the room. Hitching her billowing dress up, she shuffles to the table. “Mom, you gave the DJ the thumb drive with the music?”

Our mother drains her glass before daintily taking a seat on the plush couch. “*Sí*, Amelia. I gave your little plastic stick to the white man with cornrows in the terrible suit.”

Mom's magenta dress is impeccable, her tan legs crossed at the knee as she accepts another flute of champagne from the bridal suite attendant.

"He has a gold tooth," Mom adds. "But I'm sure he's very good at his job."

Ami ignores this and her confident check mark scratches through the room. She doesn't really care if the DJ isn't up to our mother's standards, or even her own. He's new in town, and she won his services in a raffle at the hospital where she works as a hematology nurse. Free beats talented, every time.

"Ollie," Ami says, eyes never straying from the list in front of her, "you need to get dressed, too. Your dress is hanging on the back of the bathroom door."

I immediately disappear into the bathroom with a mock salute. "Yes, ma'am."

If there's one question we're asked more than any other, it's which one of us is the oldest. I would think it's fairly obvious, because although Ami is a mere four minutes older than me, she is without a doubt the leader. Growing up, we played what she wanted to play, went where she wanted to go, and while I may have complained, for the most part I happily followed. She can talk me into almost anything.

Which is exactly how I ended up in this dress.

"*Ami.*" I throw open the bathroom door, horrified by what I've just seen in the small bathroom mirror. *Maybe it's the light*, I think, hiking up the shiny green monstrosity and making my way to one of the larger mirrors in the suite.

Wow. It's definitely not the light.

"Olive," she answers back.

"I look like a giant can of 7UP."

"Yes, girl!" Jules sings. "Maybe someone will finally crack that thing open."

Mom clears her throat.

I glower at my sister. I was wary of being a bridesmaid in a Winter Wonderland-themed wedding in January, so my only request as the maid of honor was that my dress wouldn't have a scrap of red velvet or white fur. I see now that I should have been more specific.

"Did you actually choose this dress?" I point to my abundance of cleavage. "This was intentional?"

Ami tilts her head, studying me. "I mean, intentional in the sense that I won the raffle at Valley Baptist! *All* the bridesmaids dresses in one go—just think of the money I saved you."

“We’re *Catholic*, not Baptist, Ami.” I tug on the fabric. “I look like a hostess at O’Gara’s on St. Paddy’s Day.”

I realize my primary error—not seeing this dress until today—but my sister has always had impeccable taste. On the day of the fittings, I was in my boss’s office, pleading, unsuccessfully, to not be one of the four hundred scientists the company was letting go. I know I was distracted when she sent me a photo of the dress but I don’t remember it looking this satiny or this green.

I turn to see it from another angle and—dear God, it looks even worse from the back. It doesn’t help that a few weeks of stress-baking have made me, let’s say . . . a little fuller in the chest and hips. “Put me in the back of every picture, and I could be your green screen.”

Jules comes up behind me, tiny and toned in her own shiny green ensemble. “You look hot in it. Trust me.”

“*Mami*,” Ami calls, “doesn’t that neckline show off Ollie’s collarbones?”

“And her *chichis*.” Mom’s glass has been refilled once more, and she takes another long, slow drink.

The rest of the bridesmaids tumble into the suite, and there is a loud, collective, emotional uproar over how beautiful Ami looks in her dress. This reaction is standard in the Torres family. I realize this may sound like the observation of a bitter sibling, but I promise, it’s not. Ami has always loved attention, and—as evidenced by my screaming on the six o’clock news—I do not. My sister practically glows under the spotlight; I am more than happy to help direct the spotlight her way.

We have twelve female first cousins; all of us in each other’s business 24/7, but with only seven (free) dresses included in Ami’s prize, hard decisions had to be made. A few cousins are still living on Mount Passive-Aggressive over it and went in on their own room together to get ready, but it’s probably for the best; this room is way too small for that many women to safely maneuver themselves into Spanx at the same time, anyway.

A cloud of hair spray hangs in the air around us, and there are enough curling and flat irons and various bottles littering the counter to keep a decent-sized salon going. Every surface grows either tacky with some sort of styling product or hidden beneath the contents of someone’s overturned makeup bag.

There’s a knock at the suite door, and Jules opens it to find our cousin Diego standing on the other side. Twenty-eight, gay, and better groomed than I