



## If You Only Knew

By Kristan Higgins

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**The drama, hilarity and tears of sisterhood are at the heart of the thoroughly captivating new novel by *New York Times* bestselling author Kristan Higgins—a funny, frank and bittersweet look at marriage, forgiveness and moving on**

Letting go of her ex-husband is harder than wedding-dress designer Jenny Tate expected...especially since his new wife wants to be Jenny's new best friend. Sensing this isn't exactly helping her achieve closure, Jenny trades the Manhattan skyline for her hometown up the Hudson, where she'll start her own business and bask in her sister Rachel's picture-perfect family life...and maybe even find a little romance of her own with Leo, her downstairs neighbor, a guy who's utterly irresistible and annoyingly distant at the same time.

Rachel's idyllic marriage, however, is imploding after she discovers her husband sexting with a colleague. She always thought she'd walk away in this situation, but her triplet daughters have her reconsidering her stance on adultery, much to Jenny's surprise. Rachel points to their parents' perfect marriage as a shining example of patience and forgiveness; but to protect her sister, Jenny may have to tarnish that memory—and their relationship—and reveal a family secret she's been keeping since childhood.

Both Rachel and Jenny will have to come to terms with the past *and* the present and find a way to get what they want most of all.

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## **If You Only Knew By Kristan Higgins Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Higgins is the queen of the summertime read with a little something more. Her witty characters who find, and sometimes lose, love will keep readers glued to her books for hours." - Library Journal starred review on *If You Only Knew*

"Higgins' trademark humor and charm are at full strength in her latest effort." - *Aleksandra Walker*, Booklist

"Romance superstar Kristan Higgins makes a brilliant crossover into women's fiction. The kind of book I enjoy the most-sparkling characters, fast-moving plot and laugh-out-loud dialogue. A winner!" -Susan Elizabeth Phillips, New York Times bestselling author

"This emotional journey of two sisters is filled with drama, laughter and tears and squeezes the heart. It should be on every bedside table in the country!" -Robyn Carr, #1 New York Times bestselling author

"Romance star Higgins shifts smoothly and poignantly into women's fiction with this emotionally compelling story...With a secondary cast of characters who buoy an already perceptive study of love, marriage, sisterhood, and loyalty, Higgins delivers. A powerful, emotionally textured winner.?" -Kirkus Reviews

"Oh, what a satisfying and delicious read! I admired the writing, the wit, the keen eye at work here. Thank you, Kristan Higgins, for making our heroine a smart, wry, sisterly designer of wedding dresses. Is that not heaven on the page?" -Elinor Lipman, bestselling author of *The View From Penthouse B*

"Both gut-wrenchingly emotional and hysterically funny at the same time...Kristan Higgins writes the books you don't want to end." -#1 New York Times bestselling author Robyn Carr

"Kristan Higgins is a rising superstar, thanks to whippet-fast, funny dialogue and sweet plots with a deliciously tart edge." -USA TODAY

"Strong storytelling and a refreshing, sarcastic edge... Thoroughly entertaining." -People

"Fans should take care not to read [*Waiting on You*] in church or anywhere else a gut-busting laugh would be inappropriate." -New York Times

"Higgins exhibits her storytelling artistry with another stunning romance that includes her trademark touches of laugh-out-loud humor and tear-jerking pathos." -Kirkus starred review on *In Your Dreams*

"Romance fans and lovers of women's fiction will devour this witty and tender novel. Highly recommended." -Library Journal starred review on *Somebody to Love*

#### About the Author

Kristan Higgins is a New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author and two-time winner of the Romance Writers of America RITA Award. Her books have been praised for their "genius level EQ, whippet-fast, funny dialogue and sweet plots with a deliciously tart edge" (USA TODAY). She lives in

Connecticut with her heroic firefighter husband and two extremely advanced children, one shy little mutt and an occasionally affectionate cat.

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Jenny

Today is one of those days when I realize that staying friends with my ex-husband was a huge mistake.

I'm at the baby shower for Ana-Sofia, Owen's wife and my replacement. Indeed, I'm sitting next to her, a place of honor in this circle of beaming well-wishers, and I'm probably beaming just as hard as everyone else. Harder, even, my "gosh, isn't it wonderful, she's so radiant" smile that I give at work quite often, especially as my brides get bitchier or their mothers get more critical or their maids of honor get more jealous. But this smile, the baby-shower smile...this is superhuman, really.

I know that coming today is incredibly pathetic, don't worry. It's just that I didn't want to seem bitter by not showing up—though I'm pretty sure I *am* bitter, at least a little. After all, I'm the one who always wanted kids. Every time I brought it up, though, Owen said he wasn't sure the time was right, and he loved our life the way it was.

Yeah. So. That turned out not to be quite true, but we did stay friends. Coming today, though...pathetic.

However, I woke up this morning utterly starving, and I knew the food would be amazing at the shower. Ana-Sofia *inspires* people. Plus, I'm moving out of the city, so for the past three weeks, I've been trying to eat or give away every morsel of food in my apartment. Let's also mention that I couldn't figure out an excuse that people would buy. Better to be an oddity here than Poor Jenny at home, scrounging through a box of Wheat Thins of indeterminate age.

Ana-Sofia opens my gift, which is wrapped in Christmas paper, despite it being April. Liza, my host, glowers; the red-and-green cocoa-swilling Santas are an affront to the party vibe, which Liza noted on the invitations.

In an effort to create a beautiful and harmonious environment for Ana-Sofia, please adhere to the apricot-and-sage color scheme in your clothing and gift-wrapping choices.

Only in Manhattan, folks. I'm wearing a purple dress as a middle finger to Liza, who used to be my friend but now posts daily on Facebook that she's LOLing with her BFF, Ana-Sofia.

"Oh! This is so lovely! Thank you, Jenny! Everyone, look at this! It's beautiful!" Ana-Sofia holds up my gift, and there are gasps and murmurs and exclamations and a few glares that I have brought the best present. I cock an eyebrow at the haters. *Suck it up, bitches*. My gift was actually dashed off last night, as I kind of forgot to buy a present, but they don't have to know that.

It's a white satin baby blanket with leaves and trees and birds stitched into it. Hey. It only took me two hours. Nothing was hand-stitched. It wasn't that big a deal. I sew for a living. A wedding-dress designer. The irony is not lost on me.

"Couldn't you have just bought a stuffed animal like a normal person?" murmurs the person on my left. Andreas—born Andrew—my assistant, and the only man here. Gay, of course—do straight men work in designer bridal wear? Also, he hates and fears children, which makes him the perfect date for me under the

circumstances. I needed an ally.

Have I mentioned that the shower is being held in the apartment I once shared with Owen? Where, so far as I could tell, he and I were extremely happy? Yes. Liza is hosting, but the power went out in her apartment, thanks to the ham-fisted construction crew installing her new glass countertops—granite being so very last decade—and so we're here instead. Liza is sweaty and loud, rightfully worried about being judged on her prowess as hostess. This is the Upper East Side, after all. We're all about judgment here.

The gifts—including mine—border on the ridiculous. The shower invitation—engraved from Crane's—asked, at the behest of the parents, for donations to the clean-well-water charity Ana-Sofia founded—Gushing...org, the name of which brings to mind a particularly bad menstrual period, but which raises funds for wells in Africa. Yeah. Therefore, everyone donated fat checks *and* tried to outdo each other with gifts. There's a Calder mobile. A 1918 edition of Mother Goose stories. A mohair Steiff teddy bear that costs about as much as the rent on my soon-to-be former apartment in the Village.

My gaze drifts across the now-tastefully furnished apartment. When I lived here, it was cozier and boho—fat, comfortable furniture; dozens of pictures of my three nieces; the occasional wall hanging from Target, that bastion of color and joy for the middle class. Now the decor is incredibly tasteful, with African masks on the wall to remind us what Ana-Sofia does, and original paintings from around the globe. The walls are painted those boring neutral colors with sexy names— October Fog, Birmingham Cream, Icicle.

There's their wedding photo. They eloped, so thank God I didn't have to go to that—or, heaven forbid, make her gown, which I would've done if asked, because I'm still pretty pitiful where Owen is concerned and can't figure out how to divorce him out of my heart. Though the photo was taken by the justice of the peace in Maine, it's perfect. Both bride and groom are laughing, slightly turned away from the camera, Ana's hair blowing in the sea breeze. The *New York Times* featured the photo in the Sunday Vows section.

They really are the perfect couple. Once, it was Owen and me, and while I didn't expect perfection, I thought we were pretty great. We never fought. My mom felt that since Owen is half-Japanese, he was a better bet than "those simpletons" I dated—all of whom I hoped to marry at one point or another, starting with Nico Stephanopolous in eighth grade. "The Japanese don't believe in divorce," Mom said the first time I introduced her. "Right, Owen?"

He agreed, and I can still see his omnipresent, sweet smile, the Dr. Perfect Smile, as I called it. It's his resting expression. Very reassuring to his patients, I'm sure. Owen is a plastic surgeon, the kind who fixes cleft palates and birthmarks and changes the lives of his patients. Ana-Sofia, who is from Peru and speaks five languages, met Owen eleven weeks after our divorce when he was doing his annual stint with Doctors Without Borders in the Sudan and she was digging wells.

And I make wedding dresses, as I believe I've already said. Listen, it's not as shallow as it sounds. I make women look the way they dreamed they would on one of the happiest days of their lives. I make them cry at their own reflections. I give them the dress they've spent years thinking about, the dress they'll be wearing when they pledge their hearts, the dress they'll pass on to their own daughters someday, the dress that signifies all their hopes and dreams for a happy, sparkling future.

But compared with what Owen and his second wife do, yeah, it's incredibly shallow.

In theory, I should hate them both. No, he didn't cheat with her. He's far too decent for that.

He loves her, though. Ostensibly, I could hate him for loving her and not me. Make no mistake. I was heartbroken. But I can't hate Owen, or Ana-Sofia. They're too damn nice, which is incredibly inconsiderate of them.

And being Owen's friend is better than being without Owen entirely.

The quilt has made the rounds of admiration and is passed back to Ana. She strokes it tenderly, then looks at me with tears in her eyes. "I don't have the words to tell you how much this means."

*Oh, shut up, I want to say. I forgot to buy you a gift and dashed this off last night with some leftover Duchess satin. It's no big deal.*

"Hey, no worries," I say. I'm often glib and stupid around Ana-Sofia. Andreas hands me another cream puff. I may have to give him a raise.

"I'm so excited about your new shop," Ana continues. "Owen and I were talking about how talented you are just last night."

Andreas gives me a significant look and rolls his eyes. He has no problem hating Ana-Sofia *and* Owen, which I appreciate. I smile and take another sip of my mimosa, which is made with blood oranges and really good champagne.

If I'm ever pregnant, though the chances of that are plummeting by the hour, I imagine I'll have the unenviable "I sat on an air hose" look that my sister had when she was percolating the triplets. There was no glow. There was acne. Stretch marks that made her look as if she'd been mauled by a Bengal tiger. She gnashed on Tums and burped constantly, but in true Rachel fashion, my sister never complained.

Ana-Sofia *glows*. Her perfect olive skin is without a blemish or, indeed, a visible pore. Her boobs look fantastic, and though she is eight and a half months pregnant, her baby bump is modest and perfectly round. She has no cankles. Life is so unfair.

"We just found out that our daughter's classmate is her half brother," says the taller woman in Lesbian Couple #1. One of them just became a partner in Owen's practice, but I don't remember her name. "Imagine if we hadn't known that! She could've ended up dating her half brother! Marrying him! The fertility clinic gave out *fourteen* samples of that donor's sperm. We're filing a lawsuit."

"It's better than adopting," says another woman. "My sister? She and her husband had to give back their son the fourth time he set fire to the living room."

"That's not so bad. My cousin adopted, and then the birth mother came out of rehab and the judge gave her custody of the baby. After two years, mind you."

On the other side of the circle, there seems to be a heated debate over whose labor and delivery was most grueling. "I almost died," one woman says proudly. "I looked at my husband and told him I loved him, and the next thing I knew, the crash cart was there..."

"I was in labor for three *days*," another states. "I was like a wild animal, clawing at the sheets."

"Emergency cesarean eight weeks early, no anesthesia," someone else says proudly. "My daughter weighed

two pounds. NICU, fifty-seven days."

*And we have a winner!* The other mothers shoot her resentful looks. Talk turns to food allergies, vaccines, family beds and the sad dearth of gifted and talented programs for preschoolers.

"This is fun," I murmur to Ana-Sofia.

"Oh, yes," she says. Irony is not one of her skills. "I'm so glad you are here, Jenny. Thank you for giving up your afternoon! You must be very busy with the move."

"You're moving?" one of her extremely beautiful and well-educated friends asks. "Where?"

"Cambry-on-Hudson," I answer. "I grew up there. My sister and her family are—"

"Oh, my God, you're leaving Manhattan? Will you have to get a car? Are there any restaurants there? I couldn't live without Zenyasa Yoga."

"You still go to Zenyasa?" someone says. "I've moved on. It's Bikram Hot for me. I saw Neil Patrick Harris there last week."

"I don't do yoga anymore," a blonde woman says, studying a raspberry. "I joined a trampoline studio over on Amsterdam. Sarah Jessica Parker told me about it."

"What about brunch?" someone asks me, her brow wrinkling in concern. "What will you do for brunch if you leave the city?"

"I think brunch is illegal outside Manhattan," I answer gravely. No one laughs. They may think I'm telling the truth.

Now, granted, I love Manhattan. To paraphrase the song, if you make it here, the rest of the world is a cakewalk. And I *have* made it here. I've worked for the best—even Vera Wang, as a matter of fact. My work is sold at Kleinfeld Bridal and has supported me for fifteen years. I was named one of the Designers of the Year when I was at Parsons. I've been to not one, but two parties at Tim Gunn's place. He greeted me by name—and yes, he's as nice as he seems.

But while I love the city, its roar, its buildings and smells, its subways and skyline, in my heart of hearts, I want a yard. I want to see my nieces more often. I want the happily-ever-after that my sister nailed, that's unfolding for my ex-husband and his too-nice wife.

I hope I'm running to something, not away. The truth is work has felt a little flat lately.

Cambry-on-Hudson is a lovely little city about an hour north of Manhattan. It has several excellent restaurants—some even serve brunch, shockingly. The downtown has a movie theater, flowering trees, a park and a Williams-Sonoma. It's hardly a third-world country, no matter what these women think. And the latest shop is Bliss. Custom-made wedding gowns. My baby, in lieu of the human kind.

My phone beeps softly with a text. It's from Andreas, who has put in his earbuds in order to drown out the stories of blocked milk ducts and bleeding nipples.

Check out the nose on the great-aunt. I hope the baby inherits that.

I smile at him gratefully.

"Did you hear about the obstetrician who fathered fifty-nine babies?" someone asks.

"That was an episode on *Law & Order*"

"Ripped from the headlines," someone else murmurs. "Someone in my building was one of his patients."

"Oh. Oh, dear," Ana-Sofia says.

I turn to her. She looks a bit startled. "It's probably not true," I tell her.

"No... I think... It appears my water has broken."

There is a silence, followed by a collective roar.

I'll spare you the details. Suffice it to say that, despite there being a dozen women who've given birth all jockeying for position, my hand is the one Ana-Sofia clutches. "Oh, Jenny, it's happening," she says. "I feel something." Her beautiful brown eyes are wide and terrified, and then I'm easing her onto the floor and crouched between her still-slim thighs—really, it's like she's showing off. I slide off her thong—she's maintained her bikini wax, FYI—and, holy Mother of God, I can see the head.

I fumble in my purse for the travel-size Purell (if you ride the subways on a daily basis, you carry Purell) and slather some on my hands. "Get some towels and quiet down!" I bark at the other shower guests. I'm kind of good in emergencies. Liza hands me a stack of towels—very soft and about to be ruined by whatever comes out of a woman during childbirth.

"Let me help," Liza whines. Indeed, this would make a great Facebook post. Just delivered my BFF's baby, LOL!—with Ana-Sofia Marquez-Takahashi.

"I need to push," Ana pants, and she does, once, twice, a third time, and a face appears—a baby! There's a baby coming into my hands! One more push, and I'm holding it, slimy and covered in white gunk and a little blood and incredibly beautiful.

Dark hair, huge eyes. A miracle.

I ease her out all the way and put her on Ana's chest. "It's a girl," I say, covering the baby with a towel.

It seems like just a few seconds later that FDNY clomps in, and I entertain a quick and deeply satisfying fantasy—*The head firefighter is filled with admiration for my cleverness, checks me out and asks me to dinner in the cutest Brooklyn accent the world has ever heard. His biceps flex hypnotically, and at the end of the date, yes, he does pick me up to demonstrate just how easy it would be for him to save my life, and a few years later, we have three strong sons, twin daughters on the way. And a Dalmatian.*

But no, their attention is quite taken with Ana-Sofia—as it should be, I guess, though it would be nice if just one of them checked me out. Someone cuts the cord, and Ana is weeping beautifully over her daughter, and Liza holds her phone to Ana's ear so my ex-husband can sob his love and admiration for his wife, who just



set the land-speed record for laboi and delivery.

From down the hall, I can hear Andreas dry-heaving in the tastefully decorated powder room over the murmurs oi admiration from the shower guests and the brawny firefighters as they tell Ana how amazing she is, how beautiful hei daughter is.

Seems as if I'm leaving the city in the very nick of time.

## **Users Review**

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