

When the going gets tough,
the tough go to the pugs...

pug hill

“A delightful romp!”

—Wilson the Pug with Nancy Levine,
authors of *The Tao of Pug*



Author of *If Andy Warhol Had a Girlfriend*

alison pace

“There’s a terrific comedic eye at work
here, and a tender heart.” —Elinor Lipman,
author of *The Inn at Lake Devine*



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PUG HILL

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PRAISE FOR
If Andy Warhol Had a Girlfriend

"*If Andy Warhol Had a Girlfriend* is pure, guilt-free pleasure. When you're not laughing your head off, you're in the middle of a remarkably honest and heartfelt story about a woman who has to find love inside herself before she can find it outside."

—Joseph Weisberg, author of *10th Grade*

"Laugh-out-loud funny."

—*Booklist*

"Alison Pace takes us on a whirlwind transcontinental journey (first class, of course) with a lovable main character who, amid the crazy world of abstract art, discovers a little inspiration of her own."

—Jennifer O'Connell, author of *Bachelorette #1*
and *Off the Record*

"A funny, feel-good fairy tale set improbably in the high-powered international art world. *If Andy Warhol Had a Girlfriend* will give hope to the most relationship-weary heart."

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"A poignant and very funny look at the dating life of a fictional New York gal."

—*The Washington Post*

"This book is GENIUS! I stayed up all night laughing hyena-style."

—Jill Kargman, coauthor of *Wolves in Chic Clothing*

continued . . .

“A sweet, stylish tale about love, art, travel, and highly pampered dogs. *If Andy Warhol Had a Girlfriend* is a terrific, unique read full of heart and humor. I loved it!”

—Johanna Edwards, author of *Your Big Break*

“Art lovers, dog lovers—even EX-lovers—will love this fun, funny book.”

—Beth Kendrick, author of *Fashionably Late*

“A laugh-out-loud look at art fairs, true love, and overindulged miniature schnauzers. A great read!”

—Kristen Buckley, author of *The Parker Grey Show*

“A fresh and beguiling story set in New York’s art milieu . . . Perfectly balancing comic missteps with insights, Pace gets Jane’s tricky growth spurt just right.”

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“A funny, snappy, beauty of a read—I loved it.”

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and *Bras & Broomsticks*

“Simmers with a quiet brilliance and polish that will stay in a reader’s mind for days.”

—Chicklitbooks.com

*For Mom and Dad
(Happy Anniversary)*

acknowledgments

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prologue

Someday we'll find it.

—Kermit the Frog

For Holly Golightly, there was always Tiffany's. No matter what was going wrong in her life, she always had Tiffany's. For me, there's always Pug Hill. For as long as I've lived in New York, whenever I've wanted to think, or relax, or be happy, or even sad, my destination of choice has been, without fail, Pug Hill.

Pug Hill, if you haven't heard, is a hill in Central Park, over on the east side around Seventy-fourth Street, where pugs from all over New York City convene. Just as I imagine Holly Golightly was in it much more for the diamonds than for the big building on the corner of Fifty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, I'm in it much more for the pugs than for Central Park. It's not that I don't like the serenity and tranquility of Central Park as

much as the next New Yorker, it's just that I've always had a pretty big thing for dogs.

Dogs have always been a great presence in my life, have always affected it in ways you might call deeply. I simply can't imagine my life without them. I wonder if it must speak volumes about me that I've never had one of my own.

What I do have right now are all the same reasons as all the other people in New York who love dogs but don't have one: I work too much, I'm not home enough, my apartment is too small, it's *never* the right time. But one day, and I don't doubt this at all—or at least, I try not to doubt it—it will be. And of all the dogs there are to love, pugs are, by far, my favorite.

So until that day, when the right time begins, I try to content myself with all the many versions of my favorite, all the endlessly comforting pugs of Pug Hill. I know all the regulars. I know their names and the colors of their harnesses and I know which pugs to expect if I visit on a Saturday or if I visit on a Sunday. Most of the time I'm the only person at Pug Hill without a pug. And that might seem kind of sad, but actually, it's not. I like to think that, in its own way, it's kind of hopeful really, if you think about it.

chapter one

The End

“Conservation,” Elliot says quietly as he picks up the phone, and then, a moment later, “Okay, hold on a sec, please.” I watch Elliot, focusing intently on the flick of his wrist as he hits the hold button and puts down the receiver. I watch Elliot a lot; it’s a problem, it might be a bit stalkerish, this I know.

“Hope,” he says, looking over at me, “it’s your dad.”

I look away, embarrassed, regretful. I tell myself it isn’t my fault. I had, after all, no way of knowing the call was going to be for me. Really, I had no way of knowing that Elliot wasn’t going to look across the room right then, not at me, but at our coworker, Sergei, or at our boss, May—people who the call could have much more likely been for. Nobody calls me at work. People e-mail me, or they instant message me when I turn on the

IM during lunch, but they refrain for the most part from calling. It's generally understood that I don't like the phone. It causes me anxiety.

"Thanks," I say without looking up and reach for the phone. As I do so, it occurs to me that Dad, even more than anyone else, doesn't ever call me at work. Dad thinks talking on the phone while at the workplace is slacking. Though I don't think he uses that actual word, Dad doesn't approve of slacking and does not wish to be an accessory to it.

"Hi, Dad," I say, worried now, wondering if maybe Dad is breaking his rule of never calling because something is wrong.

"Hi, Hope, how are you?" he says, very much *not* like anything at all is wrong. Dad's voice is calm and clear and assured, as it almost always is. For as long as I can remember, I have always felt so assured from just the sound of Dad's voice.

"I'm good. Is everything okay?" I ask just to be sure there isn't actually something wrong and I have just been lulled into a false complacency by the very soothing and comforting nature of my dad's voice

"Oh, everything's fine," he says, "I'm not disturbing you at work, am I?" I tell him, no, not at all.

"Well, good then, I'm calling because I have some exciting news and wanted to talk to you about it right away." I wonder if this exciting news has something to do with my older sister, Darcy. In my family, a lot of things have to do with Darcy. I try my best to push the thought from my mind.

"Sure, what's up?"

"Well, Mom and I have decided to have a party for our fortieth wedding anniversary. May seventh is a Saturday this year; we'll have it right on the actual date," he tells me happily.

“That’s great,” I say, and I think to myself, not for the first time, *Wow, forty years.*

“Oh, yes, we’re already really looking forward to it. Mom’s already all caught up in the planning. You know how she loves a project.”

Oh, I know, I think, believe me, I know.

“Yes,” I say in lieu of anything that could be construed as hostile.

“Well, Hope,” he says and pauses for a moment, “Mom and I were thinking how nice it would be if, at the party, you made a speech.”

A speech.

I say nothing. I stare blankly ahead of me as the word *speech* scrapes through my brain like nails on a chalkboard.

Well, Hope, I think to myself, because suddenly all I want in the world is to go back to the part of the conversation where Dad hadn’t said anything about a speech, where he’d only said, *Well, Hope.* I want to go back to *Well, Hope* and have something, anything, even something about Darcy come after it.

“I’m sorry?” I say in a last-ditch effort to allow myself to think that I didn’t hear what I thought I just heard, a last-ditch effort to delude myself into believing that this couldn’t really be happening. But, sadly, tragically even, Dad simply says the same thing again.

“Mom and I were thinking how nice it would be for you to make a speech at the party.”

He says it happily, in anticipation, it seems, of all the niceness that will surely be my speech. He says it all just like it’s any other sentence, any other perfectly harmless sentence. He says it all as if what he’s just said won’t, in its own quiet way, kill me.

“A speech?” I ask and the words don’t sound like nails on a chalkboard anymore, now they sound very much like the first two bars of the theme song from *Jaws*.

Duh-duh!

My heart has stopped beating. I put my hand to my chest.

“A speech, yes,” he says it yet again. I listen to the *duh-duh!* getting louder and louder in the background.

I sit frozen, phone in hand, and along with the music, I listen to this voice in my head: it’s listening to the *Jaws* music, too, and it’s shouting at me, quite loudly, “Get your drunk, naked ass out of the ocean, you are about to be eaten alive by a motherfucking GREAT WHITE SHARK!”

And then, there is another voice in my head, one that apparently isn’t listening to the music. This one speaks calmly, softly. It says to me, “Look, so you’ve had this one thing, public speaking, that has scared you more than anything else for your entire life. So it’s your Great White Shark, so it’s your BIG SCARY THING, it’s also your parents’ fortieth wedding anniversary.” The voice pauses for a moment, maybe just to be sure that what it has said has sunk in, and then continues, “You love your parents and your dad has asked this important favor of you, and really,” the voice asks me, “*who* says no to such a request?”

“Really,” it says again, “*who?*”

I think for a minute that maybe *I* do, that maybe *I* am the person who says no to such a request.

The shark is approaching, faster and faster, bigger and bigger, but somehow, I manage to think how saying no would be so ungrateful, so flippant, and so disrespectful of forty years of marriage. Saying no seems kind of hostile and churlish and as right as I want it to be, I know it would be wrong.

"I'd love to, Dad," I say, and wonder how much time has actually passed.

Dad says, "Wonderful."

Somehow I refrain from explaining to him that this is all pretty damn far away from wonderful. Instead, I say, "Great," and then I say, "okay."

The *okay*, I know, is more to calm myself than for any other reason.

"Great."

There is no more *Jaws* music. The voices in my head, the frantic one, along with the calm, cool, and collected one, have both fallen silent. I listen, helpless, hopeless, alone, as Dad says, "Okay, then, back to work. Love you, Hope. Talk to you soon."

"Love you, too, Dad. Bye," I say, and put down the phone. My heart has started beating, though I wonder if it will ever beat in quite the same way again.

I stare blankly at my computer screen. I try to think how long I've been trying to prevent this from happening. Ever since Mr. Brogrann's tenth grade English class, and the disaster that was my oral report on *The Grapes of Wrath*, I've been petrified, horrified really, of even just the *thought* of public speaking. Since then, I've taken great pains to avoid any sort of public speaking; in fact many decisions in my life, it could be said, have been predicated on keeping this fear at bay. It may seem like a lot, like too much really has stemmed from that day in tenth grade English that began with my freezing in front of the class and ended some horrible twenty minutes later with my throwing up, locked safely in a bathroom stall. But that's how it happened.

The waves of repercussion from that ill-fated speech, they started right away. In eleventh grade, I dropped Advanced Placement Topics in European History as soon as I saw the soul-

shattering words, *forty-minute final presentation*, on the last page of the syllabus. And pretty much, it all just snowballed from there. To tell you the truth, at this point, it's a pretty big snowball. That I work in Paintings Conservation is not exactly a coincidence. Yes, it is the result not only of a lot of training and study and genuine, real interest on my part, but it is also quite closely related to the fact that early on in college I realized how much time an Art History student spent sitting quietly in a darkened room, watching slide shows.

A professor told me once, in a way I believe was meant to deter me, that an MFA in Paintings Conservation was not all hands-on practical application, but actually entailed quite a lot of research, quite a lot of sitting in libraries, chasing down footnotes. It sounded to me at the time very much like an earthly heaven.

One decision slyly led to the next, not unlike the way sand will bury your feet and then your ankles if you stand at the beach, a little ways back from where the waves break. But that might not be the best analogy, because with the sand it's different. With the sand there's something reassuring in knowing that you can walk away, in knowing that you won't actually be buried alive.

The farther away I got from that oral report in Mr. Brogrann's class, the more determined I was to make sure I never went back. And as the years went on, I felt more and more sure I never would. I made it through high school, college, and graduate school. I had a job as a paintings restorer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a very good job that I actually loved, and that would never require me to make a speech. I'd been a bridesmaid a few times, but all those brides had sisters so I'd never been a maid of honor, a speech-making danger zone if ever there was

one. And then, at last, I'd believed that I was safe. I'd somehow managed to lull myself into complacency; I became so certain it would never come up again, that I'd almost forgotten all about it. Until today. Today, regardless of everything I have done over the years to keep this fear at bay, here it is, leering at me like a scary birthday party clown.

The IM symbol, the little yellow man with the blue triangle, starts jumping, up and down, at the bottom of my computer screen. I reach for my mouse and click on the bouncing yellow man. An IM window pops up on my screen.

EVAN2020: *You remember that I'm playing squash tonight with Brandon and then we're having dinner with him and his fiancée after at the club? Like eight?*

I quit out of IM without answering. Then I do the only thing I can think of, the only thing I can think of that makes any sense. I leave.

