



Out In
a
Limb

HANNAH BONAM-YOUNG

Out On a Limb

Hannah Bonam-Young

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Author's Note

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Only five days after my first child was born, I posted the following caption on Instagram...

“The only thing I have ever thought I couldn’t do with one hand was be a good mom. It might not be rational, but every time I heard some cliché comment about moms needing an ‘extra set of hands,’ it would make my stomach churn. Growing up, there were often times when adults wouldn’t let me hold their babies out of fear, and at some point, I took that to heart. I have held on to this insecurity, and I didn’t really address it until this week. Now, I’d like to say that ten fingers are overrated, because this kid and I have got a good thing going on so far.”

I had been a mother for less than a week, and yet I felt as if I’d experienced every possible human emotion under the sun. I was physically and mentally recovering from a traumatic labour experience and difficult pregnancy. My nipples hurt, my body ached, and I was *convinced* my vagina would *never* be the same. And yet... I was so, so ridiculously happy.

Not just because of the tiny baby we'd brought home (who's pretty great), but because I was wrong to be afraid. Because *they* were wrong. I was absolutely capable of being a good mother.

I, like Win, was born with my limb difference. I have a less-developed right hand that is identical to Win's as described in this book. And while I've tried my best throughout my life to not let it hold me back, it has certainly created challenges. I've always found myself attempting to perform things in private that I'll be expected to do in public. Things as small as buttoning a new pair of pants or typing to take notes in class. I've spent hours upon hours thinking through daily obstacles, coming up with small adjustments, and planning out my days in agonising detail in order to avoid any awkwardness or failure. Then, I found out I was pregnant, and suddenly I felt totally and completely unprepared. I knew that nothing could prepare me for what came next, and I was terrified...

I wanted to write a book for anyone who's let fear of failure slow them down. Not just for those of us who choose to have kids, or those of us who are disabled, but for anyone who's been thrust into something new that took them so far out of their comfort zone they no longer recognised their past, afraid self. I wanted to write something about two people who love each other so much that they're able to change the negative thought patterns they've held on to and embrace their differences fully. Where love is shown to be validating, kind, considerate, joyful, patient, and gentle.

In this book, Win goes on a journey to motherhood via pregnancy. Because her pregnancy is entirely unexpected, I chose to include conversations between Win, her medical team, and her support system about the option of abortion. It's worth noting that this book is set in Canada, where rights to abortion are not currently under threat as they are elsewhere, and therefore,

her options are less limited. Ultimately, Win chooses to keep her baby, but it felt necessary to include those discussions, given that the fundamental right to access safe, legal abortions is being challenged near constantly. Win's choice is not superior, nor is she pressured into it. Win's choice is just that. *Her choice.*

To end this note, I just want to say that I know that pregnancy in romance novels is a hot topic. It's not for everyone, and that's perfectly okay. But this book is a lot more than a one-night stand turned baby. It's about learning to let someone see the messy, needier parts of you. It's learning to be loved well as you are and accept help. It's about challenging expectations and overcoming obstacles. It's **disabled joy**. Which we all need to see more of, if you ask me.

I hope you love Bo and Win as much as I do.

All my love,

Hannah Bonam-Young

Content Warnings: Graphic sexual content, pregnancy and symptoms of pregnancy, brief discussion of abortion (pro-choice stance, not performed), ableism in reference to a limb difference, verbally abusive ex-partner (no reappearance), death of a parent (past, off page) depression and suicide (past, off page), cancer (past, not reoccurring), amputation (past, off page).

A black and white line art illustration of a man and a woman embracing. The man is on the right, wearing a jacket with a floral pattern on the sleeve, and is holding a bouquet of roses. The woman is on the left, wearing a crop top and jeans, and is holding a single rose. The scene is framed by several other roses and stems with leaves, some positioned above the text and others below it.

*Out
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a
Limb*

HANNAH BONAM-YOUNG

For Ben, for always being my right hand man.
I'm sorry you'll never win at rock, paper, scissors.
I love you.

CHAPTER 1

“Did you know this song might be about an orgy?” I ask the witch standing next to the punch bowl, pointing toward the speaker.

“What?” she shouts, using tar-black talons to pull her willowy silver wig away from her ear.

“The song—'Monster Mash.'” I point toward the speaker again.

“What about it?” she asks, louder.

“An orgy!” I yell just as the music comes to an abrupt stop—my friend and host of the evening, Sarah, hopping onto a dining chair to address her guests.

“No, thanks...” Witch woman sends daggers my way as she slowly turns around and walks, funnily enough, toward the archway decorated in bloodied weapons.

“You should be so lucky,” I mutter under my breath as I fill my cup with an undisclosed neon-green substance, avoiding the floating candied eyeballs successfully.

Sarah, my lifelong best friend, is giving her yearly *thank you so much for coming to my Halloween party; it's the only thing I care about* speech while

I'm debating about whether anyone is secretly keeping track of how many hot-dog-mummies I've eaten thus far.

Nah. And so I reach for another.

"Aye-aye Captain Winnifred!"

Fuck, I've been spotted. I drop the mummy into my drink and cover the top of my cup with my hand.

"You okay?" Caleb, Sarah's husband, asks, eyeing my cup with suspicion.

"Never been better," I chime sweetly. "It's another successful year," I say, admiring their home, decorated with professional precision.

Caleb does the same, and when his expression turns to subtle pride and admiration for his wife's work, I place a bet to the universe that the next three words out of his mouth will be...

"Anything Sarah wants," we say in unison. He smiles into the top of his beer with a hint of guilty shyness, but mostly resolve. Sarah and Caleb met in the ninth grade. He's been carrying her textbooks, literally and metaphorically, since.

I love Caleb. He's like a brother to me. A brother-in-law if Sarah and I were *actually* sisters like we used to boldly claim (see: lie) in school. Turns out, according to a DNA test a few years back, we're fourth cousins once removed. Sarah simply says we're cousins now, when given the chance.

"You know, my friend Robbie is here. I thought I might introduce you," Caleb says after a long sip of his beer.

Yeah, absolutely not.

I've been successfully avoiding the guys Caleb wants to set me up with since my date with his buddy from work. Winston cried while describing his—*very much alive*—mother and the "beautiful bond" they shared. He also brought me an orchid, which could have been a sweet gesture—I do love

plants. Unfortunately, it was in a large ceramic bowl with rocks and bark, and it weighed a ton. I couldn't just put it on the ground, lest a server trip over it and meet an untimely death, so it had to sit on the table between us—blocking our view of one another. Then, after a dull dinner, I had to carry it home with me, clinging to it in the back of the taxi as I wrote a kind but firm *let's not do this again* text.

If anything, that date only solidified my desire to remain casual and stick to dating apps where I could properly vet the men for myself.

“Maybe later,” I answer Caleb. “I’m just waiting to talk to our hostess.” I tilt my chin toward Sarah, who’s dressed as the Princess Buttercup to Caleb’s Westley.

“Okay, fine. This one is different, though. He even has a dead mom,” Caleb adds far too excitedly.

“Oh, bonus!” I say, matching his energy. “I love when their mom is dead. It makes things so much easier around the holidays.”

Caleb laughs, turning to fill a cup with lime punch. “Here.” He holds it out to me before taking my mummified drink and tossing it into the trash can. “Eat however much you want, Win.”

I take the drink, leaning toward him. “That might be the sexiest thing you have ever said to me, Caleb.”

Just then, someone slaps my ass. “Is he flirting with you again? God, I’ve told you both so many times—if you’re going to have an affair, at least be discreet.”

“Buttercup! So nice of you to join us,” I say, smiling broadly.

“Love the costume... again.” Sarah sighs, pointing with a limp wrist to my elaborate pirate get-up.

“Until I grow a hand, this will still be prime comedy.” I jab her boob with

my hook until she giggles, swatting me away.

“We have to go talk to a bunch of people, but do you want to sleep over tonight? I made up the spare bedroom and—”

“Yes, I will help clean up. I do it every year, babe,” I interrupt. “Go! Entertain your masses.”

Sarah jumbles the words *thank-you-you’re-the-best* into one long sequence as she tugs Caleb away like an extremely willing puppy on a leash.

“Great costumes,” an exceptionally drunk woman dressed as a red crayon slurs, walking toward me. The blue crayon next to her adds, “Think you might win the couples’ contest,” as they pass by.

Couples costume? Me? Single Winnie? Puh-lease.

They must have mistaken Caleb for a pirate and my betrothed. Westley was the Dread Pirate Roberts, after all. So it’s not a far-off presumption. But my pirate style is a lot more of your classic wench-whore. My boobs are practically earrings at this height, and my fishnet stockings are ripped from years of re-wear, giving them the perfect *accidentally* slutty look. My waist is cinched with a wide pleather belt, and I’ve tied a red bandanna around my shoulder-length black hair. That’s a new addition after my accompanying pirate’s hat was lost during last year’s debauchery. May she rest in peace.

I will keep wearing this costume until the joke gets old. That wasn’t a lie. But it’s also because—let’s be real—I look hot in it. Additionally, I’m too broke to buy something new. But let’s not talk about that.

There’s another layer of Sarah’s genius. Lock down the cutest computer geek as early as possible, make them fall madly in love with you, and then wait for them to become filthy rich. Now Sarah’s the fun friend full time. Party hostess, event planner, voracious reader, a childless housewife with a

maid. She's currently trying to decide between themes for *my* thirtieth birthday party, which still isn't for another eighteen months.

"Pardon me?" a low, sardonic voice calls from behind me, making me turn.

Oh, *there* he is. The other pirate I've been unknowingly paired with. Though this one, I would certainly not make walk the plank.

My first thought? He's tall. Really tall. As if his body was stretched out with a rolling pin before being placed into whatever magical golden boy oven he was baked in. He's got that tousled, nineties-boy-band, middle-parted hair that's suddenly back in style. It's dark blond, which I can choose to forgive. He has a crooked smile that says *get out while you can* under a not-crooked but rugged nose and soft eyes. The juxtaposition of which is strikingly adorable.

"I'm so sorry," he says without any sincerity, "but one of us has to change."

"Oh my god," I say, flattening my skirt before resting my hands on my waist. "This is so embarrassing... What are the odds?"

"Right? I mean there's no way either of us is winning the singles costume contest this way and"—he leans in to whisper by bending over at the waist, and he's *still* taller than me—"I'm not wearing anything under this."

I fight the laugh, not wanting this bit to end. I so rarely get a new sparring partner. Never one this cute.

"Well, that's unfortunate. You should have planned better. I have a few costumes under this one."

The corner of his lip twitches, but he seems to resist giving me any reaction beyond that. Challenge accepted.

"Such as?" he asks, crossing his arms over his chest.

"A Viking," I answer.

“Now that you mention it, I do see a horn peeking out just a little.” He motions to the side of my head with a bent finger.

“That’s actually standard issue for all of Satan’s spawn, but I could see how you got confused.”

“Concerning. What else?”

“A sexy maid, of course,” I say, batting my lashes.

“Well, that I have to see,” he quips back far too quickly.

Here, I think, is where I win the laugh-off we’re pretending not to have. Shock value always wins.

“But I must insist on keeping the pirate costume, I’m afraid. You see”—I let go of the hook’s inner handle and pull it away in my left hand, revealing my smaller, less-developed right hand underneath—“I am in need of a hook.” I wave at him mockingly, my tiny, curled fingers, shorter than the first knuckle, wagging as best as they can.

He doesn’t break like I want him to. But he *does* grin mischievously. His eyes crackle with humour, pulling me in at a concerning speed. I’d be frustrated if his expression wasn’t so damn intriguing. Something about his amusement signals that, perhaps, he’s one step ahead of me.

“Oh, I see. Well, then... maybe we can come to some sort of compromise.” He sticks out his foot between us.

You’ve got to be joking.

CHAPTER 2

He's got a prosthetic leg. It's covered, loosely, in a vinyl sticker made to look like wood, the kind you'd use to line your kitchen shelves, giving the illusion of a pirate's peg-leg underneath black trousers he has tied up at the knee with thin, corded leather rope.

"God dammit!" I yell. Which finally gets him to laugh. And it's a great one too. A hearty, deep, boisterous sound from the back of his throat that makes his jaw tense and his neck jump. Uninhibited. And, dare I say, sexy.

"I really felt like I was going to win this round," I say, my voice unsteady.

He hasn't stopped laughing—harder than I am, actually. I'm not used to that, and it's honestly refreshing. I've been told I laugh obnoxiously loud. Some have even gone so far as to compare me to a baby seal calling for its mother. *Some* meaning more than one person—in two separate instances—have expressed that exact sentiment.

"This is a couple's costume. The crayons were right," I say through breathless fits of joy.

He clutches his chest as if to steady himself, his laughter finally beginning to die down. Then I'm treated to the view of a boyish, tilted smile and sincere eyes sweeping over me from head to toe and back again.

I wonder if he likes what he sees. Actually, I'm *hoping* he likes what he sees. Because I certainly like what he's got going on. The longer he looks me up and down, the more I consider him approving of my appearance.

My black not-quite-straight but not-quite-curly shoulder-length hair. My thin eyebrows from merciless plucking in my teenage years. My sharp-edged nose, with a simple gold piercing on the left nostril, set between glacier blue eyes. My body is shoved and tucked into this costume to prop up my tits and shrink my waist, but that's mostly illusion.

I would describe my frame as fairly average. I enjoy long walks, swimming, and dancing, but I equally love rainy days plastered to the couch, pastries, and overly sweetened coffees. My arms and back are strong and sculpted from years of training in butterfly and breast strokes, but my hips and stomach hold the pleasure of a well-fed, comfortable woman. I don't try to force my body to be something or deprive it of pleasures. It just *is*. And I like it, *enough*, as is.

But what does this seemingly perfect specimen before me look like on an average day? He strikes me as someone who grew up beautiful. The small tilt of arrogance of his chin combined with the naive sweetness in his smile that I wish wasn't so disarming. He's probably a foot taller than me, and I can't help but wonder how hard I'd have to yank on his pleated pirate blouse to bring his lips down to mine.

"I'm Bo." He extends his left hand—which my body hears as *would you like me to fuck you?* Because there's nothing more awkward than shaking

with my right hand and *nothing* more attractive than a man who could have anticipated that.

I shake his hand enthusiastically. “Win.”

“Is that short for something?” he asks, dropping his hand and sliding it into his trouser pocket.

“Winnifred, but no one really calls me that. What about you?” I make a point to emphasise the stretch of my neck, staring up at him as if he’s some sort of fairy-tale giant. “Are you tall for something?”

He can’t *stop* laughing now. I can’t stop wanting to make him.

“What?” he asks, eyes lit with enjoyment.

“Seriously, what are you? Nine feet tall?”

“Six.”

“Six *what* though?”

“Six-five.”

“Wildly unnecessary for daily life. Do you play basketball?”

“Eh, used to.” His smile falters only a touch—but I notice. I notice, too, that he—perhaps subconsciously—moves to rub his knee, just above where his prosthesis begins.

I wince. “Sorry,” I offer plainly. “I was born with my hand. So I stupidly forget other people—”

“No worries,” he interrupts me, smiling with his chin pushed out.

“I ruined that. But this was nice before then, wasn’t it?”

He looks away, smirking yet visibly shy, his eyes shifting and his body softly swaying. “It can still be nice. I could even the score? Make fun of your hand, if you’d like?” he offers, clearly unserious.

“Yes, please do. That would actually help a lot,” I say, calling his bluff.

He turns to face me, staring me down with crescent eyes and an ever-