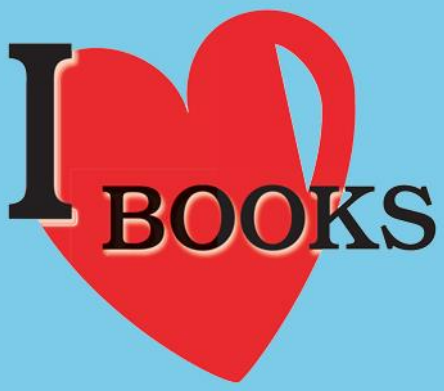


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Opening extract from

Bridesmaid-In-Training

Written by

Meg Cabot

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Saturday 13 June
4.00 p.m.
Royal Genovian Gardens
High Tea



< NishiGirl

Hi, Olivia! Is everything OK? I know it must be super stressful getting ready for your sister's wedding, but I'm coming there this week (!!!) and you haven't texted me back about how many bathing suits I should bring.

My mom says 5 is too many. But I don't want to be unstylish in Genovia, especially around all those royals and celebrities.

I really hope you aren't mad at me or anything and that's why you haven't written back. Did I do something wrong? OK, well, write back soon (if you aren't mad)!!! ☺ ☺ ☺ Nishi

Oh no. My best friend, Nishi, thinks we're in a fight or something.

But that's not why I haven't texted her in so long. I've just been really super busy. It's no joke, training to be a princess. I've barely had time to write in this notebook, let alone text!

Of course, it hasn't exactly been horrible, either. Not to sound like I'm bragging or anything, but things have been going really *SUPER GREAT.*

And it's not just because I:

1. Get to live in a castle that has its own throne room and ballroom and private library filled with about fifty thousand books (not exaggerating).

2. Have a completely brand-new wardrobe and my own room with orange trees outside my

windows and a private bathroom and a walk-in closet with a couch inside it where I can sit while my personal style consultant, Francesca, figures out what I'm going to wear (only on the days when I have state functions, though. Francesca says it's important not to wear the same thing twice in a row, or it 'disappoints the populace').

3. Get to live in Genovia, which is a tiny country between Italy and France along the Mediterranean Sea, which has white sand beaches and really nice weather year-round.

No! Although that stuff really is pretty awesome. The reason things are going so great is because I finally get to live with people who *actually care about me*.

Now, when I come down to breakfast in the morning, my dad and Grandmère and my sister, Mia, and her fiancé, Michael, ask how I slept, and what I'd like to eat, and what I'm going to do today, and things like that.

My aunt and uncle and cousins back in New

Jersey never *once* asked me any of that stuff. They never cared whether I wanted cereal or French toast or waffles or pancakes or asked me how I liked my eggs. They never even gave me a choice! All we ever got for breakfast back at my old house was oatmeal. Not because they were poor or anything, but because oatmeal is low in fat and high in fibre.

'Oats are nature's broom.' That's what my aunt always used to say.

'Oats?' Grandmère said when I told her this. 'Oats are for horses!'

Ha! I know this is true because as part of my princess lessons, I'm learning how to horseback ride. Dad even got me my very own pony (I was never allowed to have pets at my old house because my aunt didn't want the carpets getting dirty, but now I have a poodle puppy, Snowball, *and* a pony).

The pony's name is Lady Christabel de Champaigne, but I call her Chrissy for short. Chrissy is tan all over, except for her mane and tail, which are gold coloured. When I'm grooming Chrissy — I

love to brush her — she makes happy puffing noises with her mouth.

I'm not saying that everything is perfect, of course. Nothing is perfect, not even being a princess and having people love you and living in a palace in the Mediterranean with orange trees outside your bedroom window.

Like right now, for instance, Grandmère and Mia are having another one of their ~~fights~~. (Sorry, I mean disagreements. Grandmère says royals never fight. They have 'disagreements'.)

This disagreement is about Mia's royal wedding, which is exactly one week away.

'No, Grandmère,' Mia is saying. 'I told you before. No purple.'

'But purple is the colour of royalty, Amelia. And it's a *royal* wedding.'

'It's a *summer* wedding in a palace next to the beach. Purple is too dark. Besides, the dresses have already been delivered, and they're cream coloured, just like I asked. We can't change them now.'

‘Can’t we, Amelia?’ Grandmère asked. ‘There’s such a thing as *dye*, you know.’

‘Grandmère,’ Mia said. ‘My bridesmaids’ gowns are cream coloured. And that is final.’

Oh! Mia looks mad. But then, so does Grandmère.

There’ve been a *lot* of disagreements like this, especially since the wedding is going to be on television and shown worldwide. Five hundred people, including some of the world’s most well-known celebrities and royals, have been invited. There’s barely room for all the wedding gifts that have already arrived and are on display in the Great Hall.

There are some pretty cool gifts:

- A solid-gold decorated ostrich egg from Australia
- A two-hundred-piece tea set from China
- Silver plates from the people of Austria
- A Moroccan-style crystal-encrusted pet bed for Mia’s cat, Fat Louie, from the royal family of Qatar

- And a charitable donation in Mia's and Michael's names to Doctors Without Borders from the president of the United States!

(Personally I don't think charitable donations are a very interesting gift, but donations are what Mia and Michael asked for.)

But here's a secret that almost no one knows, and why there's been so much ~~fighting~~ disagreeing around the palace:

Almost nothing is ready.

It's true! You would think that in a palace that is used to putting on state functions for hundreds of guests, everything would run like clockwork.

But that doesn't turn out to be the case when you're talking about a royal wedding for five hundred that had to be moved up several months because it turns out the bride is having twins.

That's right: I'm going to be an aunt! I went from basically having no family to having SO MUCH FAMILY.

I'm pretty excited about this. I'm especially excited because I get to help pick out the names. The names I've chosen are:

Girl Names	Boy Names
Minnie	Cecil
Vivian	Roberto
Genevieve	Julian
Yvette	Steve

Mia and Michael won't say yet which names they've chosen (they don't even know if the babies are girls or boys).

But Michael keeps joking that if they're boys, he's going to call them Han and Solo (although Mia says she doesn't think this is very funny, and I agree. Naming your baby is serious business, especially if they're in line to a throne).

Anyway, all this hurried-up wedding planning means that in addition to the thousand tourists we get inside the palace every day (it's open for public tours every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., except on Sundays and national holidays), we've also been getting huge amounts of:

Florists, landscapers, stylists, decorators, designers, dressmakers, bakers, musicians, photographers, electricians, builders, contractors, caterers and television studio executives, all running around, trying to get everything ready in time for the Big Day.

But since Mia is what Grandmère calls 'hormonal' — and my dad calls 'stressed' — whenever anyone asks her a wedding-related question, she just goes, 'Pick whatever. I'm sure it will be great.'

But other times — like with the colour of the bridesmaid dresses — she *totally* has an opinion. And it's usually a very boring one, because she doesn't want anyone to make a fuss.

But you HAVE to make fuss over a ROYAL WEDDING. That's the whole point of being a princess bride!

'It's because your sister is a Taurus,' Grandmère says. 'The Taurus is the bull of the astrological signs, and bulls are loyal but stubborn, which makes them strong leaders but absolutely terrible brides.'

I wouldn't know. I'm a Sagittarius. Sagittarians always look on the bright side.

And my dad is 'no help,' according to Grandmère, not only because he's 'a man' and weddings 'scare men' (although I don't think this is true of *all* men; Michael doesn't seem very scared), but because he decided to retire as prince so he could spend more quality time with me, since he missed out on so many of my 'formative years' already.

Except now he's super busy having the summer palace renovated so I can go live in it with him, Mia's little brother, Rocky, and Rocky and Mia's mom, Helen Thermopolis, who Dad says he's going to marry as soon as the summer palace is finished. That way we can 'leave Mia to rule and enjoy being a new bride and mother in peace'.

But it turns out it's going to take months and months to renovate the summer palace because it's nearly five hundred years old and the whole place is sinking into the ground because the foundation is rotten, which Grandmère says is 'ironic'.

I don't really care, though, because until it's fixed, I get to keep living here in the main palace with Mia

and Michael and Grandmère and Fat Louie and the twins when they're born!

'Honestly, I don't know what your sister would do without us,' Grandmère said to me just this morning while we were in the royal greenhouse, cancelling the teeny boring white roses that Mia had ordered and replacing them with much more beautiful huge purple irises. 'Now that your father has stepped down from the throne, she's so busy consulting with that new prime minister about important matters of state — such as where to house all those refugees from nearby war-torn countries, and what to name that new strain of genetically modified Genovian orange — that she hasn't a moment to herself. I've no doubt your sister will save the country, of course. But we're the ones who are going to save this wedding, Olivia.'

'I know,' I said. 'Right?'

'It is,' Grandmère said, 'a blessing that we're here.'

It totally is! I hope the summer palace *never* gets a new foundation.

So I don't feel bad about writing in my journal or even texting Nishi back while Mia and Grandmère are ~~fighting~~ disagreeing, since they aren't even paying attention to me and I know it's all for Mia's own good, anyway.

OlivGrace >

Of course I'm not mad at you! It's just that things are super busy. I hope you like the colour purple, because that's what we're going to dye the bridesmaid dresses.

I think 5 bathing suits is fine. Remember, there's a pool here AND the beach. Plus, Grandmère says you can never have too many of anything except enemies.

Guess what else??? Grandmère says we have the most important job of the ENTIRE wedding party, because we have to hold up Mia's train as she walks down the aisle. I'm so excited!!! Can't wait to introduce you to Chrissy!!! And everyone else, of course.

Saturday 13 June
5.00 p.m.
Royal Genovian Gardens
High Tea



Nishi finally texted back, but she didn't say what I was expecting her to.

< NishiGirl

I'm glad things are going OK and you aren't mad at me!

OK, 5 bathing suits it is.

I can't wait to see you!!!!!!!

It's going to be so so fun to hold up your sister's train! And meet your pony.

But I don't see how you're going to have any time at all to spend with me when you're going to be so busy starting princess school on Monday.

School? Who said anything about school?

I think Nishi must be confused. Grandmère and Mia give me princess lessons every day so I won't embarrass myself (or the rest of the family) at the wedding or in front of the paparazzi who follow us around every time we leave the palace, trying to get a photo of 'the princess bride'.

I'm getting a princess lesson right now, as a matter of fact, which is the only reason I'm allowed to be writing in my journal during high tea. Everyone thinks I'm taking notes . . . which I am, sort of.

But princess lessons aren't the same as *real* school.

They're still super important, of course. Nobody wants a loser who doesn't have any manners

representing their country, even a country as tiny as Genovia (which is only two miles by four miles long).

Then again, I'm sure nobody wants a loser who doesn't know what the capital of France is representing their country, either.

So maybe Nishi is right.

But Dad said I need to take time to adjust to living in a new country (with a new family) before starting at my new school. And even though I've been here a month, I don't feel that I've totally adjusted yet. I don't even know the names of all my cousins or my way around the palace. There are more rooms in this palace than there are days of the month! I haven't even been in them all yet.

Not that I don't think education is valuable. It's important to learn stuff like maths and geography in addition to curtsying and drinking out of the right glass. There were *so* many glasses on the dining table in the Great Hall at the fancy dinner I went to last night in honour of all our out-of-town guests who've started to arrive for the wedding, I couldn't

even tell which water glass was mine and which one belonged to the very large man who was sitting next to me. Finally Mia nudged me under the table.

'Olivia,' she whispered. 'Do this.' She made circles with her index fingers and thumbs and held them in front of her, making the letters *b* and *d*. 'The bread plate on your left — "b" — is yours, and so are the glasses on your right — "d" for drink. Get it?'

I got it, but too late. I'd been drinking out of the very large man's water glass the entire time!

And so was he! *We were drinking out of the same glass.*

Being a princess is *way more* complicated than I ever thought it was going to be.

So given what an embarrassment I already am, it's totally possible they want me to go to some school to learn how to be a better royal . . .

But I don't know. Right now, with the wedding only a week away and Grandmère needing me so much? Something like that, you'd think someone would have mentioned it.

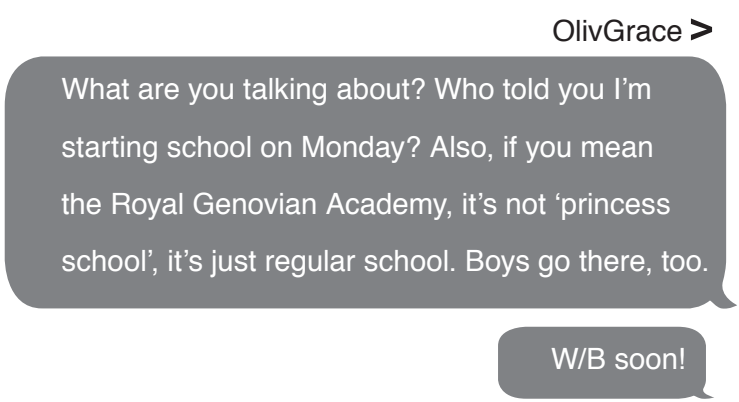
Normally I'm not allowed to look at my phone

during meals – especially high tea! – because Grandmère says it's *extremely rude* not to give your full attention to the person sitting in front of (or beside) you.

'For all you know, Olivia,' Grandmère always says, 'that person could be the leader of a country that is much, *much* bigger than yours.'

'Or,' Mia says, 'they could just be very nice, and you don't want to act like a jerk by sitting there looking at your phone and not paying attention to them.'

But since this seems very important and Grandmère and Mia are still ~~fighting~~ disagreeing over the colour of the bridesmaid dresses, I figured no one would notice if I quickly texted Nishi back. So I wrote:



What are you talking about? Who told you I'm starting school on Monday? Also, if you mean the Royal Genovian Academy, it's not 'princess school', it's just regular school. Boys go there, too.

W/B soon!

But it's been nearly ten minutes and I haven't heard back.

Which reminds me . . . it's June. No one *starts* a new school in June. That's when school gets out for summer holidays! Nishi got out of school last week!

So she must be wrong. Why would I be starting school now, right when everything is getting busiest with the wedding planning? That would be simply — WHA!!!!!

