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CONTACT: Kyle Radler  
Senior Publicist  
212-790-4295  
kradler@wnnorton.com

# WEDDING TOASTS I'LL NEVER GIVE

By Ada Calhoun

“A humorous, realistic, and loving look at marriage. . . . Each essay mixes components of memoir and self-help, drawing on insight from Calhoun’s own marriage as well as the wise thoughts of clergymen and lessons learned from long-married couples. . . . Calhoun is laugh-out-loud funny. . . . This realistic, empathetic book of advice is worthy of a spot on any newlyweds’ bookshelf.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“[A] series of graceful essays that explore the significance of marriage in a time that no longer deems marriage a necessity. Alternating between hilarious personal anecdote and sobering professional insight, this memoir conveys perhaps the simplest lesson ever given about learning to make a marriage last: just don’t get divorced.”

—*Library Journal*

“Calhoun plumbs personal material for her explorations into how to guide others through a wedding’s great beyond while drawing on extensive research and interviews with scholars, clergy, and acquaintances at different stages of marriage. . . . Readers will marvel at the connections she makes through her many-limbed approach. . . . Moving, refreshing, funny.”

—*Booklist*

“[Calhoun] approaches her subject not as the voice of wisdom and experience but as someone in the same trenches who can comfort her married readers that they are not alone. . . . [S]he’s engaging and all-too-human, chronicling the strains of being together, being apart, sharing a rental car, screwing up finances, raising a son, and somehow staying together in spite of (and maybe because of) it all. Calhoun ends with a toast that she would actually give, and it’s wise and lovely.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Ada Calhoun has written the definitive meditation on marriage in all of its mystery and imperfection. It should be required reading for anyone considering it, and highly recommended for those who want to be reminded of why they did it in the first place.”

—*Molly Ringwald*

“By turns hilariously candid, thought-provoking, and romantic, *Wedding Toasts I’ll Never Give* gave me a richer view of the joys and challenges of marriage—especially my own marriage.”

—*Gretchen Rubin, New York Times best-selling author of The Happiness Project*

“A warm, tart, corrective to the persistent conviction that a wedding is the neat end of a love story.”

—*Rebecca Traister, New York Times best-selling author of All the Single Ladies*

Ada Calhoun doesn't give wedding toasts in real life. Instead, as she tells us in the introduction to her sharp, funny, and extremely insightful book **WEDDING TOASTS I'LL NEVER GIVE** [W. W. Norton & Company; May 16, 2017; \$24.95 hardcover], she likes to sit back with a glass of champagne and enjoy other people's efforts. Luckily for us, her silence at her friends' ceremonies doesn't mean she has nothing on her mind. On the contrary, Calhoun is full of wisdom and experience, which she imparts to us with candor and grace in **WEDDING TOASTS I'LL NEVER GIVE**, inspired by her enormously popular *New York Times* "Modern Love" essay, "The Wedding Toast I'll Never Give." Weaving intimate moments from her own married life with frank insight from experts, clergy, and friends, Calhoun presents a realistic portrait of what marriage is really like, while offering advice on how to get through the not-so-idyllic aspects of lifelong commitment.

Much of our disappointment with marriage, explains Calhoun, comes from a misunderstanding of how a marriage should make us feel. The common belief is that marriage will solve all our problems. If we're married, we'll be happy. This uplifting but false sentiment is often heard in wedding toasts. If Calhoun had it her way, she would warn newlyweds of all the frustrations they'll encounter, the fights, the angst, and the pain. In her own words, "Even good marriages sometimes involve flinging a remote control at the wall." By coming to the union with this understanding, we will be better prepared for the inevitable and universal challenges that we'll face and thus we will be more likely to have a lasting marriage.

Calhoun also suggests that in order to have more success in a marriage, we should reconsider our definition of a soul mate. She tells us that the best wedding toast she's ever heard was one in which her cousin Rhoades spoke to the statistical improbability of finding a soul mate. Rhoades's point was not to argue that the partnership was any less special, but rather that all relationships arise from choice rather than from fate. Calhoun draws on J. R. R. Tolkien to further expand on this idea. In Tolkien's words, "The 'real soul-mate' is the one you are already married to." We make our soul mates. We need not worry if our partner is the "right one." Any two people can be soul mates if they decide to stick together.

Calhoun also opens up about monogamy. Like any relationship, her marriage has faced its tests. Calhoun's stance is that a certain level of freedom is helpful. According to Calhoun's childhood best friend, Asia: "You need to figure out how to build sway into a marriage, the way you do into the foundation of a building [. . .] just as a tall building or bridge without room to expand or contract, to move in stiff winds, falls down, so a marriage that's too rigid crumbles at the first tremor." Still, Calhoun warns us, we must remember that for any time we seek affection outside the relationship, we will also have to pay for it, both in guilt and in the realization that our partner also desires outside attention. Such was the case when, on a book tour, Calhoun spent the night making out with a man who was not her husband. While the encounter itself provided a great thrill, when Calhoun returned home, she paid for the indiscretion "in hours of processing." In addition to her own misgivings, Calhoun also learned that her husband had, while she was away, told another woman he found her attractive. If we allow flexibility in monogamy, we should be prepared for similar pain. If we do not wish to experience that pain, Calhoun provides an interesting piece of advice: try to find pleasure in saying no. Thinking about the deep satisfaction you will have knowing that you stay committed will help you remain faithful.

In addition to offering these sorts of helpful redefinitions and recommendations, Calhoun delivers practical advice on the suffering, both large and small, we will encounter if we're married. To deal with the moments of boredom, Calhoun suggests we think of marriages like a novel. In any longer narrative, there are bound to be less interesting moments, both for author and for reader. Yet these moments are vital for advancing the story. Similarly, in a marriage, there will be "dreary patches of plot development." There will be planning meals, creating a budget, cleaning, and childcare. These mundane events will not last forever. And, more importantly, they will make the poetic moments that much more enjoyable when they do occur.

**WEDDING TOASTS I'LL NEVER GIVE** concludes with a toast Calhoun actually *would* give. In it, Calhoun advises newlyweds to hang on to moments of grace, moments when you truly see your husband or wife for who they are, for the person you love. A wedding is one of these treasured moments, says Calhoun, and there will be more. You can't plan for them, but

they will happen. These are the moments “when you see your husband or wife through a crowd and think ‘Who is that?’ and realize it’s the person you picked and who picked you five, twenty, fifty years before.” When you’re having trouble, these are the moments to remember.

With **WEDDING TOASTS I’LL NEVER GIVE**, Ada Calhoun provides us with a great gift: if we are already in a marriage, she lets us know that we are not alone. If we one day might be married, she offers us the tools to weather the inevitable storms. Realistic yet hopeful, **WEDDING TOASTS I’LL NEVER GIVE** is a much-needed exploration of modern marriage.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ada Calhoun is the author of *St. Marks Is Dead* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), a “revelatory” (*Kirkus*), “captivating” (*Publishers Weekly*), “delightful” (*Wall Street Journal*), “timely, provocative, and stylishly written” (*Atlantic*) “ecstatic roll call” (*New York Times Book Review*). It was named a *New York Times* Editors’ Pick, Amazon Book of the Month, and one of the best books of the year by *Kirkus*, the *Boston Globe*, *Orlando Weekly*, the *New York Post*, and the *Village Voice*, which called it 2015’s “Best Nonfiction Book About New York” and in a cover profile named its author “the most important new voice on Old New York.” She has written for the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine, and the *New York Post*; her reporting has won multiple awards, including a USC-Annenberg National Health Journalism Fellowship, CCF Media Award, and Alicia Patterson Foundation fellowship. As a collaborator and ghostwriter, she has written twelve books for major publishers, including several *New York Times* bestsellers.

### **More praise for WEDDING TOASTS I’LL NEVER GIVE**

“Ada Calhoun is the friend we all need—the one who lets us behind the curtain of her good marriage to help us better understand our own. She’s smart, funny, and best of all, willing to bare all.”

—**Emma Straub, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Modern Lovers***

“This really spoke to me. It’s a beautiful love letter to what marriage is. Ada Calhoun seems like she’d be a ball to hang out with. Marriage: not so bad, guys.”

—**Kathryn Hahn, actress (*Transparent*, *Crossing Jordan*)**

“What a witty, sexy, surprising testimony to the institution of marriage! It’s the best essay collection I’ve read in a long time, just astoundingly honest and insightful about what marriage really means. And I say that as someone who has been married twenty years.”

—**Karen Abbott, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Sin in the Second City* and *Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy***

“An uncommonly gracious invitation to rethink our relationship to an institution that often seems to have us doomed before we begin. There’s been so much cant, as they used to say in the nineteenth century, written about marriage, but Ada Calhoun’s book is honest about the struggle to love another person without congratulating itself for being honest, and if that isn’t a spiritual discipline, I don’t know what is.”

—**Carlene Bauer, author of *Frances and Bernard* and *Not That Kind of Girl***

“Extremely funny and deeply insightful. With its generous spirit and breathtaking honesty, Ada Calhoun’s instruction manual of a book recalls another all-time favorite, Anne Lamott’s classic *Bird by Bird*. This slim volume is brimming with practical advice and should be mandatory reading for married people and anyone who’s contemplated taking the leap.”

—**Davy Rothbart, author of *My Heart Is an Idiot*, creator of *FOUND* magazine, and contributor to NPR’s *This American Life***

“This unflinchingly honest, astutely balanced probe of a most perplexing institution asks all the right questions. It sets up a conversation with the reader, who is challenged to reflect at each point, choosing between ‘No, that’s not me’ and ‘How did she know that?’ Most of the time, she knows.”

—**Phillip Lopate, author of *The Art of the Personal Essay***

“True, funny, and wise, Ada Calhoun’s insight into the nature of marriage is a compulsively readable and sneakily profound primer on all interpersonal relationships. She should be required to give a toast at every wedding, bar mitzvah, and funeral she attends.”

—Leah Carroll, author of *Down City: A Daughter's Story of Love, Memory, and Murder*

“Brutally honest, hilarious, and unsentimental—but never unkind—this is a book for anyone who has ever had a thought (good or bad) about the institution of marriage. I devoured this gem in one sitting. I want to marry this book.”

—Susannah Cahalan, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Brain on Fire*

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**Meet Ada Calhoun**

**May 16 \* New York, NY \* The Library at the Public Theater**  
**May 17 \* New York, NY \* Strand Bookstore (panel with Claire Dederer)**  
**May 18 \* Denver, CO \* Tattered Cover**  
**May 19 \* Boulder, CO \* Boulder Book Store (with Waylon Lewis)**  
**May 20 \* Austin, TX \* Book People (with Wayne Alan Brenner)**  
**May 23 \* Brooklyn, NY \* Spoonbill Sugartown**  
**May 24 \* Portland, OR \* Powell's Books (with Andi Zeisler)**  
**May 25 \* Berkeley, CA \* Mrs. Dalloway's (with T. J. Stiles)**  
**May 26 \* Los Angeles, CA \* Skylight Books (with Davy Rothbart)**  
**May 31 \* Philadelphia, PA \* Hill-Physick House**  
**June 2 \* Cambridge, MA \* Dire Lit Series**  
**June 6 \* Chicago, IL \* City Lit (with Christine Sneed and Rachel Swearingen)**  
**June 8 \* New Orleans, LA \* Room 220**  
**June 10 \* Maplewood, NJ \* South Orange Book Festival (with Karen Abbott)**  
**June 14 \* New York, NY \* House of Speakeasy**  
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**June 29 \* Washington, D.C. \* Sixth & I (with Mandy Len Catron)**  
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