



A Novel

CANDACE

Trading Up

BUSHNELL

NEW YORK TIMES Bestselling Author of
SEX AND THE CITY and 4 BLONDES

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CANDACE BUSHNELL

 HYPERION NEW YORK

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Trading Up

For my beautiful mother, Camille

And for my grandmother:
Elsie Salonia, who was always a big reader

The late Lucy and Lena
And my new grandmother, Jane

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And special thanks to the darling Anne Shearman for her title.

ONE

IT WAS THE beginning of the summer in the year 2000, and in New York City, where the streets seemed to sparkle with the gold dust filtered down from a billion trades in a boomtown economy, it was business as usual. The world had passed into the new millennium peacefully, the president had again avoided impeachment, and Y2K had fizzled like an ancient bottle of French champagne. The city shone in all its magnificent, vulgar, and ruthless glory.

At that particular moment, the talk of the town was Peter Cannon, an entertainment lawyer who had bilked several celebrity clients out of an estimated \$35 million. In the months and years that would follow, there would be more scandals, billions of dollars lost, and the general ripping off of the American public. But in the meantime, “the Peter Cannon affair” had involved enough bold-faced names to at least temporarily satisfy gossip-hungry New Yorkers. Everyone who was anyone either knew Peter or knew someone he had thrillingly cheated—and after all, they asked themselves, shouldn’t his clients have known better?

One of the victims was a thirty-one-year-old rock musician named Digger. Digger was one of those one-name wonders who, like so many great artists, had modest beginnings coupled with slightly freakish looks. He hailed from Des Moines, Iowa, had dirty blond hair and frighteningly white translucent skin through which one could see

blue veins, and was given to wearing porkpie hats, which were his trademark.

On the Friday afternoon of Memorial Day weekend, he was calmly sitting by the pool at his \$100,000 summer rental in Sagaponack in the Hamptons, smoking a filterless cigarette and watching his wife, Patty, who was heatedly talking on the phone.

Digger stubbed out his cigarette in a pot of chrysanthemums (there was a small pile of cigarette butts in the pot that would later be removed by the gardener), and leaned back on a teak chaise longue. It was quite a beautiful day and he really couldn't understand what all the fuss over Peter Cannon was about. Being the sort of person who considered his purpose in life to be that of a higher nature than the grubby pursuit of filthy lucre, Digger had no real concept of the value of money. His manager estimated he had lost close to a million dollars, but to Digger, a million dollars was a shadowy abstract concept that could only be understood in terms of music. He figured he could earn back the million dollars by writing one hit song, but on that pleasant afternoon, ensconced in the lazy luxury of a Hamptons day, he seemed to be alone in his *laissez-faire* attitude.

His beloved wife, Patty, was in a stew, and for the past half hour had been blathering away on the phone to her sister, Janey Wilcox, a famous Victoria's Secret model.

As he gazed across the gunite pool to the gazebo where Patty sat hunched over the telephone, taking in her pleasing, slightly zaftig figure clad in a white one-piece bathing suit, she glanced up and their eyes met in mutual understanding. Patty stood up and began walking toward him, and as usual he was struck by the simplicity of her all-American beauty: the reddish blond hair that hung halfway down her back, the cute snub nose smattered with freckles, and her round blue eyes. Her older sister, Janey, was considered "a great beauty," but Digger had never seen it that way. Although Janey and Patty shared the same snub nose, Janey's face was too crafty and feral to attract him—and besides, he thought that Janey, with her screwed-up values about status and money, her flippant, arrogant airs, and her obsession with herself was, quite simply, a narcissistic asshole.

And now Patty stood before him, holding out the phone. "Janey wants to talk to you," she said. He pulled back his lips in a grimace, revealing small, unevenly spaced yellow teeth, and took the phone from Patty's hand.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Oh Digger." Janey's musical, slightly accented voice that always put him on edge came tinkling down the line. "I'm so sorry. I always knew Peter was going to do something really, really stupid. I should have warned you."

"How would you know?" Digger asked, picking a piece of tobacco out of his teeth.

"Well I dated him a few years ago," she said. "But only for a couple of weeks. He called everyone a fucking Polack . . ."

Digger said nothing. His real last name was Wachanski, and he wondered if Janey had intended the insult. "So . . . ?" he asked.

"So I always knew he was a creep. Darling, I'm so upset. What are you going to do?"

Digger looked at Patty and grinned. "Well, I figure if he needs my money that badly he can keep it."

There was a gasp on the other end of the line and then a small silence, followed by Janey's melodic laugh. "How terribly, terribly . . . Buddhist of you," she said, unable to keep a slight sneering tone out of her voice. And then, not knowing what else to say, she added, "I suppose I'll be seeing you at Mimi Kilroy's tonight."

"Mimi who?" Digger asked, adopting the same bored tone of voice he employed when someone asked him about Britney Spears. He knew exactly who Mimi Kilroy was, but, as she came from that segment of society that, like so many of his generation, he reviled—i.e., WASP Republican—he had no intention of giving Janey this satisfaction.

"Mimi Kilroy," Janey said, with mock patience. "Senator Kilroy's daughter . . ."

"Oh, right," Digger said. But he was no longer paying attention. Patty had sat down next to him and, shifting his weight, he wrapped a skinny leg around her waist. She turned her face toward his and touched his shoulder, and as usual he felt an overwhelming desire for

her. "Gotta go," he said, clicking the OFF button on the phone. He pulled Patty on top of him and began kissing her face. He was deeply and romantically in love with his wife in a completely uncynical manner, and as far as he was concerned, that was all that mattered. Peter and Janey could go fuck themselves, he thought; and they probably would.

Well, really, Janey Wilcox thought. If Digger cared so little about money, why shouldn't he give some to her?

She peered through the windshield of her silver Porsche Boxster convertible at the endless stream of cars jammed up in front of her on the Long Island Expressway. It was so passé to be stuck in traffic on the way out to the Hamptons, especially if you were a supermodel. If *she* had an extra million, she thought, the first thing she'd do would be to take the seaplane out to the Hamptons, and then she'd get an assistant who would drive her car out for her, just like all of the rich men she knew. But that was the problem with New York: No matter how successful you thought you were, there was always someone who was richer, more successful, more famous . . . the idea of it was sometimes enough to make you want to give up. But the sight of the gleaming silver hood of her car revived her a little, and she reminded herself that at this point in her life there was no reason to give up—and every reason to press on. With a little self-control and discipline, she might finally get everything she'd always wanted.

Her pink Chanel sunglasses had slipped down her nose and she pushed them up, feeling a little thrill of satisfaction at owning the must-have accessory of the summer. Janey was one of those people for whom the superficial comfortingly masks an inner void, and yet if anyone had called her shallow she would have been genuinely shocked. Janey Wilcox was a particular type of beautiful woman, who, acknowledged only for her looks, is convinced that she has great reserves of untapped talents. Hidden under her glossy, nearly perfect exterior was, she believed, some sort of genius who would someday make a significant contribution to the world, most likely artistic as opposed to commercial. The fact that there was no evidence to support this hope

didn't dissuade her, and, indeed, she believed herself equal to anyone. If she were to meet Tolstoy, for instance, she was quite sure that he would immediately embrace her as a kindred spirit.

The traffic had slowed to twenty miles an hour, and Janey drummed her left hand on the steering wheel, her eighteen-karat-gold Bulgari watch flashing in the sun. Her fingers were long and slender—a fortune teller had once said that her hands were “artistic”—marred only by stubby fingertips with nails bitten to the quick. In the past nine months, ever since she'd been picked, Cinderella-like, to star in the new Victoria's Secret campaign, every makeup artist in town had pleaded with her to stop biting her nails, but it was an old childhood habit she couldn't break. The physical pain she inflicted on herself was a perverse way of controlling the emotional pain the world had inflicted on her.

And now, the frustration of sitting in traffic while imagining the seaplane flying overhead bearing the smarter members of the New York social set nearly drew her fingers to her mouth, but for once, she hesitated. She didn't really need to bite her nails—after all, she was finally on top of the world herself. Just a year ago, at thirty-two, she'd been practically washed up—her acting and modeling career had ground to a halt and she was so broke she'd had to borrow money from her rich lovers to pay her rent. And then there had been those shameful three weeks when she was so desperate she'd actually considered becoming a real estate agent and had even taken four classes. But hadn't fate stepped in and saved her, and hadn't she known it would all along? And glancing at herself in the rearview mirror, she reminded herself that she was far too beautiful to fail.

Her car phone rang and she pressed the green button, thinking that it must be her agent, Tommy. A year ago, Tommy wouldn't even return her calls, but ever since she'd landed the Victoria's Secret campaign and had her face plastered on billboards and featured in every magazine in America, Tommy was her new best friend, checking in with her several times a day and keeping her apprised of the latest gossip. Indeed, it had been Tommy who had informed her that morning that Peter Cannon had been arrested in his office yesterday, and

they'd had a delicious chat dissecting Peter's character flaws, the main one being that Peter had lost his head working with celebrities and had somehow fancied that he'd become a celebrity himself. New York might have been the land of reinvention, but everybody knew there was an unbreachable line between "celebrities" and "service people," and lawyers, for all their education and expertise, are still "service people." Peter's story was now circulating as a cautionary tale: When one tried to circumvent the natural laws of celebrity and fame, the result was likely to be arrest and a possible jail sentence.

But instead of Tommy's sycophantic "Hi gorgeous," a woman's voice with a clipped English accent inquired, "Janey Wilcox, please."

"This is Janey," Janey said, knowing immediately that the person calling was the assistant to someone in the entertainment industry, as it had recently become *de rigueur* in that field to employ an English assistant.

"I have Mr. Comstock Dibble on the phone. Can you take the call?" And before Janey could respond, Comstock himself came on the line.

"Janey," he said gruffly, as if he intended to get right to the point. Janey hadn't seen or heard from Comstock Dibble for nearly a year, and the sound of his voice brought back a host of unpleasant associations. Comstock Dibble had been her lover the summer before, and Janey had actually fancied herself *in* love with him—until he suddenly became engaged to Mauve Binchely, a tall, reedy socialite. His rejection of her in favor of another woman (and one who wasn't, Janey thought, even remotely pretty) had been made all the more bitter by the fact that this was a scenario that had repeated itself many times in the past. While men were perfectly happy to date her, when it came to the ultimate union of marriage, they always seemed to spurn her in favor of a more "suitable" candidate.

On the other hand, Comstock Dibble, the head of Parador Pictures, was one of the most powerful men in the movie business, and it was entirely possible that he was calling to offer her a part in his next film. So, although she longed to teach him a lesson—even if that lesson was simply that she wasn't impressed by him anymore—she knew

it would be wiser to tread lightly. That was what surviving in New York was all about—putting aside your personal feelings in favor of the possibility of advancing your position. And so, in a voice that was cold (but not nearly as cold as she would have liked), Janey said, “Yes, Comstock?”

His next words, however, sent a jolt of fear through her body. “Janey,” he said. “You know that you and I have always been friends.”

It wasn’t that his statement was so patently untrue—they weren’t, by any normal person’s standards, “friends”—but that the phrase “you and I have always been friends” was a code employed by powerful New Yorkers to signal the beginning of a potentially unpleasant discussion. It usually meant that some injury had been committed against the first party, with the implication being that since both parties were members of the same, exclusive New York society, they would try to reason it out first, before resorting to lawyers or gossip columnists. But in a second, fear was replaced by indignation as Janey wondered what possible injury she could have caused Comstock Dibble. *She* was the dumpee, not he, and as far as she was concerned, he owed her. Still, it would be far better for him to show his hand first, and getting hold of herself, she said flirtatiously, “Are we friends, Comstock? Gosh. I haven’t heard from you in nearly a year. I thought maybe you were calling to offer me a part in your next movie.”

“I didn’t know you were an actress, Janey.”

This was a jab. Comstock knew perfectly well that she’d starred in that action-adventure film eight years ago, but she didn’t take the bait. “There are a lot of things you don’t know about me now, Comstock,” she said playfully, adding, “because you haven’t called.”

She knew he was under no obligation to call her, but she also knew that there was no better way to needle a man than to make him feel guilty about fucking you and not calling for months afterward.

“I’m calling *now*,” he said.

“So when am I going to see you?” she asked.

“That’s what I’m calling about.”

“Don’t tell me that you and Mauve broke up . . .”

“Mauve’s a sweetheart,” he said, somehow implying that Janey

wasn't. This was another insult, and Janey said snidely, "Why shouldn't she be? I mean, what has she ever had to do but inherit millions of dollars . . ." To which Comstock replied in a warning tone of voice, "Janey . . ."

"Well, come on, Comstock. You know it's true," Janey said, falling back into the easy banter she'd used so successfully with him last summer. There was a part of her that hated him for rejecting her, and another part that loved being on intimate terms with one of the powerful men who ran New York. "After all," she continued smoothly, "it's easy to be nice when you've never had to work for your money . . ."

Comstock sighed as if she were completely hopeless and said, "Don't be jealous."

"I'm *not* jealous," Janey squealed. There was nothing she hated more than having her deficiencies pointed out to her. "Why on earth would I be jealous of Mauve Binchely?" Mauve was, in Janey's estimation, practically ancient for a woman—nearly forty-five—and had only one good feature: her hair, which was dark and wavy and hung halfway down her back.

But Comstock had obviously grown bored with the direction of this conversation, because he suddenly repeated, "Janey, you and I have always been friends," and added, "so I know you're not going to make trouble for me."

"Why would I make trouble?" Janey asked.

"Now, come on, Janey," Comstock said, in a low, conspiratorial growl. "You know you're a dangerous woman."

Janey's initial reaction was to be pleased with this sally—in her more egotistical moments she did fancy herself a dangerous woman who might someday take over the world—but she suspected there was a veiled threat behind Comstock's words. Last year, when she'd been broke, people had whispered behind her back that she was a whore. This year, now that she was finally successful and making it on her own, they were whispering that she was a dangerous woman. But that was New York. In a sultry voice that belied her growing consternation, she said, "If you want to be friends, Comstock, you're doing a pretty bad job of it."

He laughed, but in the next second his tone became menacing.

"You know better than to fuck with me . . .," he said, and for a moment, Janey wondered if he was going to explode in one of his legendary outbursts. Comstock Dibble, while acknowledged as a genius in the movie business, was equally known for his irrational displays of temper—he often called women "cunts"—after which he usually sent flowers. There were at least a dozen powerful men like him in New York, who could be charming one minute and rabid the next, but as long as Comstock remained the head of Parador Pictures, and as long as Parador continued to be the media's darling, Comstock would not suffer for it, and that was New York, too.

A less confident girl might have been frightened, but Janey Wilcox wasn't that kind of girl—she'd always prided herself on not being intimidated by powerful men. And so, in a voice full of wide-eyed innocence, she said, "Are you *threatening* me, Comstock?" as he spurted out, "I know you're going to Mimi Kilroy's tonight."

Janey was so surprised she started to laugh. "Really, Comstock," she said. "Don't you have better things to do than to call me about a . . . party?"

"As a matter of fact, I do," he said, adopting their familiar tone of bantering. "And that's why I'm so pissed off about this. Goddammit, Janey. Why can't you just stay home?"

"Why can't you?" Janey asked.

"Mauve is Mimi's best friend."

"So?" Janey said coldly.

"Listen, Janey," Comstock said. "I'm just trying to give you a friendly warning. It's better for both of us if no one knows we know each other."

Janey was unable to resist reminding Comstock of their former relationship. "No, Comstock," she said with a laugh. "It's better for *you* if no one knows you fucked me last summer."

And then Comstock finally did lose his temper. "Will you shut up and listen?" he shouted. Adding, "You fucking cunt!"

His scream was so loud that Janey was convinced he could be heard through her cell phone by people in the neighboring cars on the Long Island Expressway. And if he thought he could talk to her like that, he was sorely mistaken. She wasn't that desperate little girl he'd

fucked over last summer, and she meant him to know it. “Now *you* listen, Comstock,” she said with a frigid calmness. “All you’re saying is that I was good enough to fuck last summer, and this summer I’m not good enough to know you. Well, let me tell you something. I don’t operate that way.”

“We all know how you operate, Janey,” he said ominously.

“The difference between you and me is that I’m not ashamed of anything I’ve done in the past,” Janey said. This wasn’t entirely true, but she had to admit that it sounded good.

Comstock, however, wasn’t impressed. “Just keep the fuck away from me,” he said. “I’m warning you. This could be a disaster for both of us.”

And with that, he hung up.

Goddamned Comstock, Janey thought, as she pressed down on the brake. The traffic had come to a standstill and she leaned her head to the side, frowning at the line of cars.

This was supposed to be her triumphant summer, she thought angrily. Her new commercial, in which she pretended to sing and play a white electric guitar while wearing nothing more than a white silk bra and panties, had begun airing three days ago to great fanfare—and now that she was a famous supermodel, she knew this was the summer to strike. She planned to cultivate the movers and shakers who populated the Hamptons every summer; her dream was to have a “salon” where artists, filmmakers, and writers would gather to discuss intellectual topics. If pressed, she would have to admit that eventually, she wanted to direct . . . But most of all, she was assuming her new supermodel status would mean she didn’t have to deal with assholes like Comstock Dibble anymore, and would enable her to get a much better man. Naturally, she wanted to be in love, but behind every great match, wasn’t there a touch of cynicism? And there was nothing the public loved more than the alliance of two famous people . . .

But suddenly, Comstock’s phone call made her question all that, and for a moment she wondered nervously if she had, indeed, come as far as she’d imagined. All her life, it seemed, she’d been forced to sleep with rich men in order to survive—short, paunchy, bald men with hair