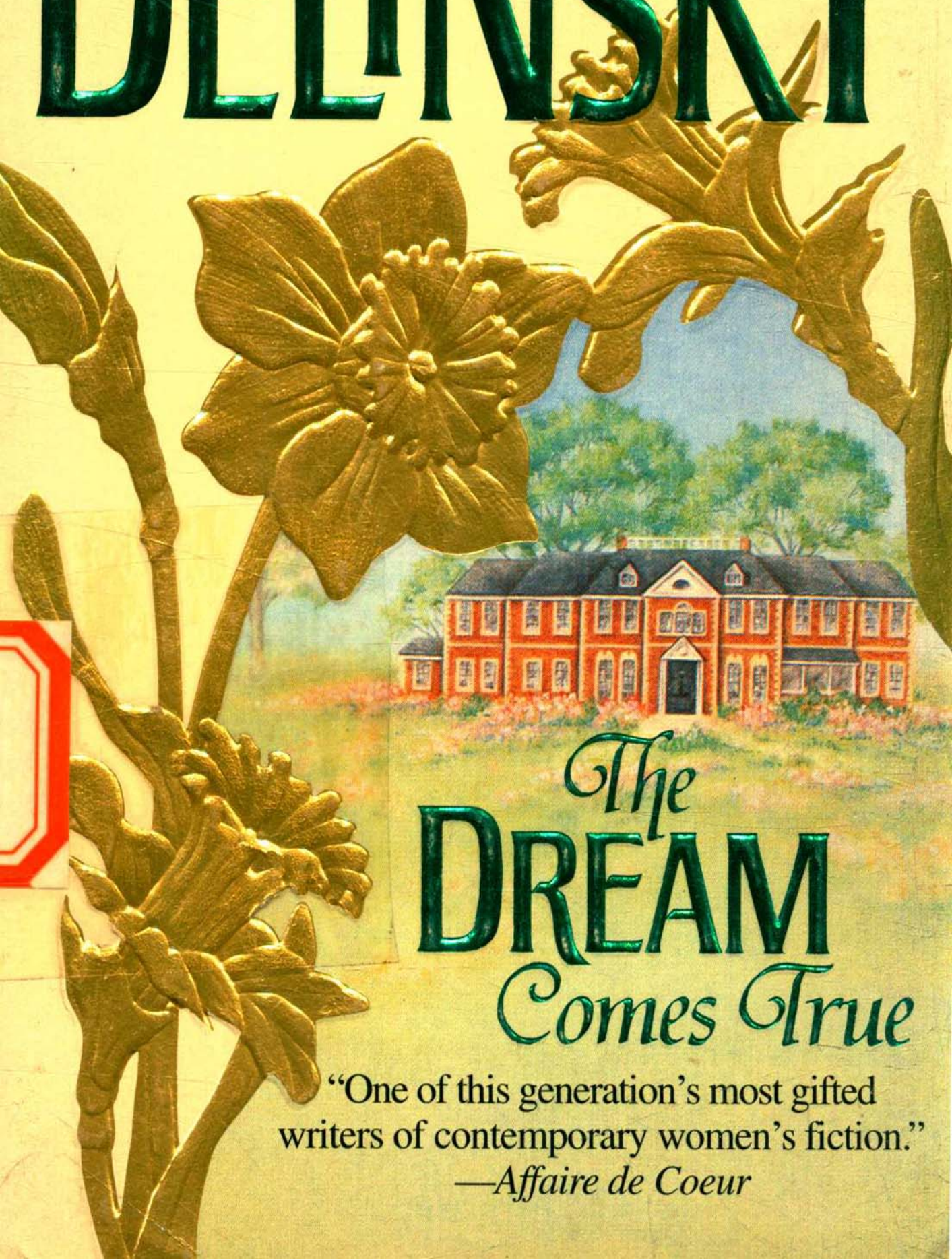


*New York Times* Bestselling Author

# BARBARA DELINSKY



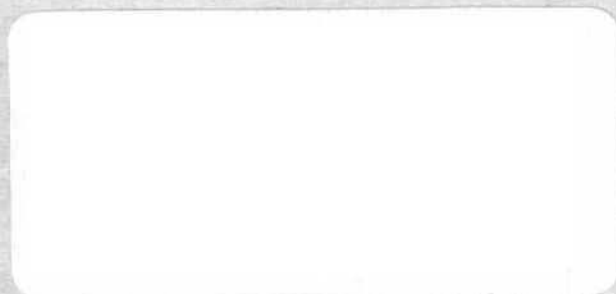
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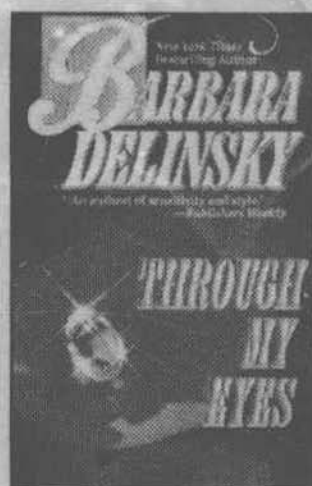
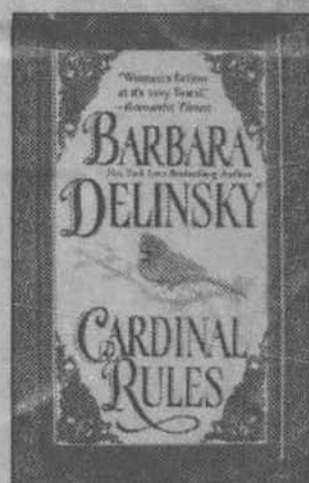
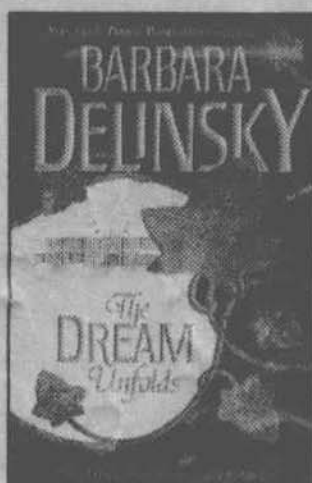
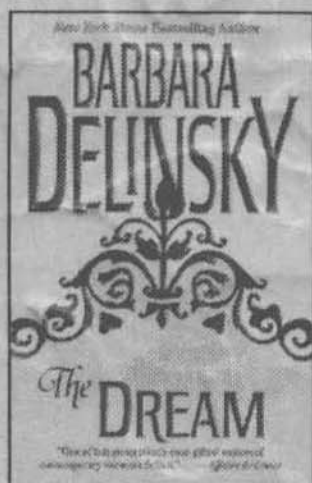
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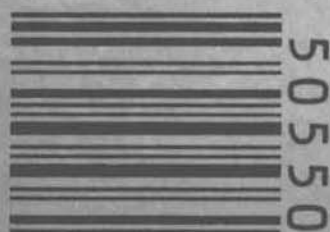
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MBDIFC7



**“You want to leave.”**

“I don’t. But I can’t stay. I’m getting better.”

For the first time John didn’t refute her argument. Instead, he said, “It’s a rat race out there. You don’t belong in it.”

“I do. It’s where I’ve always been,” Nina said quietly.

“Only because you had no other choice. But you do now. I want you to stay here, Nina. I want you to stay here with me.”

Her heart contracted. “Oh, John.”

“What does that mean?”

“I can’t. I can’t just give up everything I’ve spent a lifetime working for.”

Pulling back, he took her face in his hands. “I’m not asking you to give up everything, just to add some things. You’ve been happy here. I know you have.”

**An author “of sensitivity and style.”**

**—*Publishers Weekly***

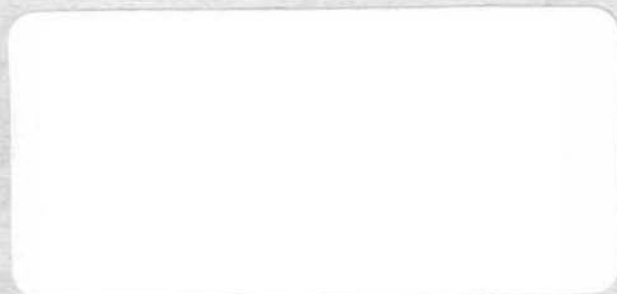
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*The*  
**DREAM**  
*Comes True*





# 1

Eight people sat around the large table in the boardroom at Gordon Hale's bank. They comprised the Crosslyn Rise consortium, the men and women who were financing the conversion of Crosslyn Rise from an elegant, singly owned estate to an exclusive condominium community. Of the eight, seven seemed perfectly content with the way the early-morning meeting was going. Only Nina Stone was frustrated.

Nina hated meetings, particularly the kind where people sat at large tables and hashed things out ad nauseam. Discussion was part of the democratic process, she knew, and as a member of the consortium, with a goodly portion of her own savings at stake, she appreciated having a say in what was happening at Crosslyn Rise. So she had smilingly endured all of the meetings that had come in the months before. But this one was different. This discussion was right up her alley. She was the expert here. If her fellow investors weren't willing to take her professional advice now that the time had finally come for her to give it, she didn't know why in the world she was wasting her time.

Nina's business was real estate. She was the broker of record for Crosslyn Rise, the one who would be in charge of selling the units and finding tenants for the retail space. It was mid-May, nearly eight months since ground had been broken, and the project was finally ready to be marketed.

"I still think," she said for the third time in thirty minutes, "that pricing in the mid-fives is shooting low. Given location alone, we can ask six or seven. What other complex is forty minutes from Boston, tucked into trees and meadows, and opening onto the ocean? What other complex offers a health club, a catering service, meeting rooms and even guest rooms to rent out for visiting friends and relatives? What other complex offers both a marina and shops?"

"None," Carter Malloy conceded, "at least, not in this area." Carter was the architect for the project and the unofficial leader of the consortium. As of the previous fall, he was married to Jessica Crosslyn, who sat close by his side. Jessica's family had been the original owners of the Rise. "But the real estate market is lousy. The last thing we want is to overprice the units, then have them sit empty for years."

"They won't sit empty," Nina insisted. "Trust me. I know the market. They'll sell."

Jessica wasn't convinced. "Didn't you tell me that things weren't selling in the upper end of the market?"

"Uh-huh, but that was well over a year ago, when you were thinking of selling the Rise intact, to a single buyer. Selling something in the multiple millions



was tough then. It's eased up, even more so in the range we're talking." She sent her most confident glance around the table. "As your broker, I'd recommend pricing from high sixes to mid sevens, depending on the size of the unit. Based on other sales I've made in the past few months, I'm sure we can get it."

"What kind of sales were those?" came the quiet voice of John Sawyer from the opposite end of the table.

Nina homed in on him as she'd been doing, it seemed, for a good part of the past hour. Of all those in the room, he disturbed her the most, and it wasn't his overgrown-schoolboy look—round wire-rimmed glasses, slightly shaggy brown hair, corduroy blazer with elbow patches and open-necked plaid shirt—that did it. It was the fact that he was sticking his nose in where it didn't belong. He was a bookseller, not a businessman. He knew nothing about real estate, and though she had to admit that he usually stayed in the background, he wasn't staying in the background today. In his annoyingly laid-back and contemplative way, he was questioning nearly everything she said.

"Three of those sales were in the eights, one in the nines, and another well over the million mark," she told him.

"For properties like ours?" he challenged softly.

She didn't blink. "No. The properties were very different, but the point is that, A, this community is in demand, and, B, there is money around to be spent."

"But by what kinds of people?" he countered in the slow way he had of speaking. "Of course, the superwealthy can spend it, but the superwealthy aren't the ones who'll be moving here. They won't want condo living when they can have ten-acre estates of their own. I thought we were aiming at the middle-aged adult whose children are newly grown and out of the house and who now wants something less demanding. That kind of person doesn't have seven or eight hundred thousand dollars to toss around. He's still feeling his way out from under college tuitions."

"That's one way of looking at it," Nina acknowledged. "Another way is that he now has money to spend that he hasn't had before, precisely because he no longer has those tuitions to shoulder. And he'll be willing to spend it. As he sees it, he's sacrificed a whole lot to raise his family. Now he's ready to do things for himself. That's why the concept of Crosslyn Rise is so perfect. It appeals to the person who is still totally functional, the person who is at the height of his career and isn't about to wait for retirement to pamper himself. He has the money. He'll spend it."

"What about the shopkeepers?" John asked.

"What about them?"

"They don't have it to spend. If you set the price of the condos so high, the rental space will have to be accordingly high, which will rule out the majority of the local merchants."

"Not necessarily."

"You'll give them special deals?"

"The rental space doesn't have to be that high."



“It can’t be anywhere *near* that high—”

Her eyes flashed. “Or you won’t move in?”

“I won’t be *able* to move in,” he said calmly.

With a glance at his watch, Gideon Lowe, the builder for the project, suddenly sat forward. “I don’t know about you guys, but it’s already nine. I’m losin’ the best part of my day.” He slanted a grin from Nina to John. “How about you two stay on here and bicker for a while, then give us a report on what you decide at the meeting next week?”

Nina didn’t appreciate the suggestion, particularly since she suspected that Gideon’s rush was more to see his wife than his men. She couldn’t blame him, she supposed; he’d been married less than a month and was clearly in love. His wife, Christine, was doing the decorating for Crosslyn Rise. Nina liked her a lot.

Still, this was business. Nina didn’t like the idea of staying on to bicker with John Sawyer when she wanted an immediate decision from the group. Keeping her voice as pleasant as possible, given the frustration she was feeling, she said, “I think this is something for the committee as a whole to decide. Mr. Sawyer is only one man—”

“One man,” Carter interrupted, “who is probably in a better position than any of the rest of us to discuss the money issues you’re talking about. He’s our potential shopkeeper.”

Jessica agreed. “Maybe Gideon is right. If the two of you toss ideas back and forth and come up with some kind of compromise before next week, you’ll save us all some time. We’re running a little short now.

Carter has an appointment at nine-thirty in Boston, I have one in Cambridge.” Murmurs of agreement came from around the table, along with the scuffing of chair legs on the highly polished oak floor.

“But I wanted to go to the printer with the brochure,” Nina said, barely curbing her impatience as she stood along with the others. “I need the price information for that.”

Carter snapped his briefcase shut. “We’ll make the final decision next week.” To John, he said, “You’ll meet with Nina?”

Nina looked at John. The fact that he was still seated didn’t surprise her at all. The consortium had met no less than a dozen times since its formation, and in all that time, not once had she seen him in a rush. He spoke slowly. He moved slowly. If she didn’t know better, she’d have thought that he didn’t have a thing in life to do but mosey along when the mood hit and water the geraniums in the window box outside the small Victorian that housed his bookstore.

But she did know better. She knew that John Sawyer ran that bookstore with the help of only one other person, a middle-aged woman named Minna Larken, who manned the till during the hours when John was with his son. Nina also knew that the boy was four, that he had severe sight and hearing problems and that her heart went out to both father and son. But that didn’t make her any less impatient. She had work to do, a name to build and money to make, and John Sawyer’s slow and easygoing manner made her itchy.



Typically, in response to Carter's query, John was a minute in answering. Finally he said, "I think we could find a time to meet."

Forcing a smile, Nina ruffled the back of her dark boy-short hair and said in a way that she hoped sounded sweet but apologetic, "Wow, this week is a tough one. I have showings one after another today and tomorrow, then a seminar Thursday through Sunday."

"That leaves Monday," Carter said buoyantly. "Monday's perfect." Putting an arm around Jessica's waist, he ushered her from the room.

"Carter?" Nina called, but he didn't answer. "Jessica?"

"I'll talk with you later," Jessica called over her shoulder, then was gone, as were all of the others except John. Feeling thwarted, Nina sent him a helpless look.

With measured movements, he sat back in his chair. "If it's any consolation, I don't like the idea of this any more than you do."

She didn't know whether to be insulted. "Why not?"

"Because you're always in a rush. You make me nervous."

She *was* insulted, which was why she set aside her normal tact and said, "Then we're even, because you're so slow, you make *me* nervous." But it looked as though the group would be expecting some sort of decision from John and her, and she couldn't afford to let them down. There were some important people