



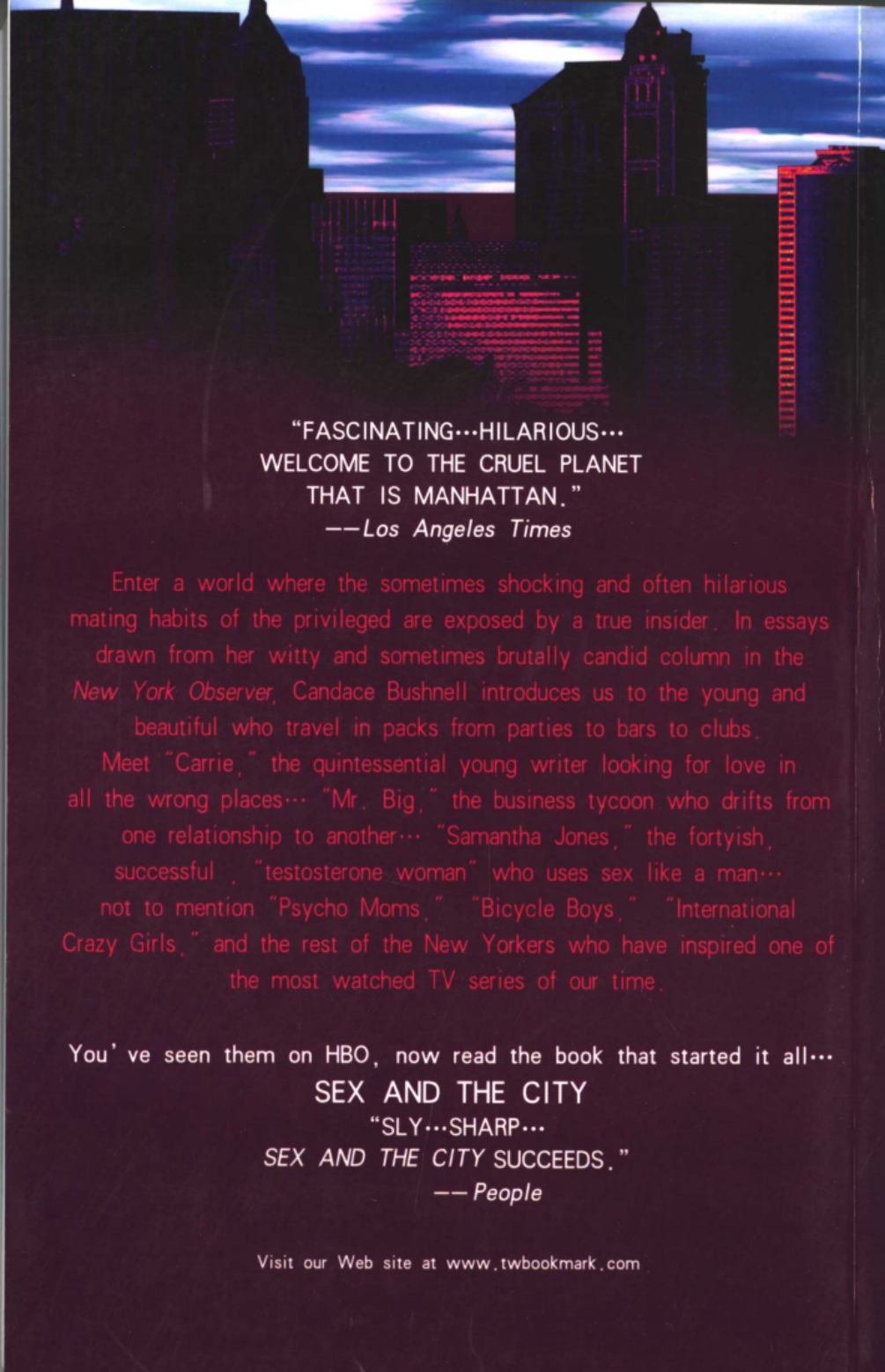
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SEX AND THE CITY

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CANDACE BUSHNELL

Author of Four Blondes



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Sex and the City

Candace Bushnell



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*For Peter Stevenson and Snippy, Who once bit his teddy bear
And to all my friends*

Introduction

Before *Sex and the City* was a book and a TV series, it was a column in the *New York Observer*. This was in the fall of 1994, and I'll never forget the afternoon the editor-in-chief asked me if I wanted my own column. I immediately said yes, and afterwards practically skipped up Park Avenue with joy. I had no idea how I was going to pull off this column, but I was convinced that it should somehow be about me and my friends—a group of single women all of whom seemed to have had a never-ending series of freakish and horrifying experiences with men (and sometimes with the same men). We spent hours discussing our crazy relationships, and came to the conclusion that if we couldn't laugh about them, we'd probably go insane.

I suppose that's why *Sex and the City* is such an unsentimental examination of relationships and mating habits. Although some people find its lack of sentiment and cruel humor disturbing, it's probably only because the book contains some kind of universal truth. Although the column was originally meant to pertain specifically to New York City (hence stories like "The Modelizers"—about two geeky guys who manage to date eighteen-year-old models but end up paying a price), I've found that there are variants of these *Sex and the City* characters in most large cities around the world. I still haven't decided whether or not that's scary.

But most of all, *Sex and the City* sets out to answer one burning question—why are we still single? Now, with a few years' perspective on the issue, I can safely conclude that we are single because we want to be.

This edition of *Sex and the City* contains two new chapters, which were written after the book was originally published. And so, at last, the book has a real ending, in which Carrie and Mr. Big break up. It's a bittersweet ending—not just the end of Carrie's relationship with Mr. Big, but the end of her dream of finding the proverbial Mr. Big—a man

who doesn't really exist. If you read closely, you'll discover that even Mr. Big himself points out that he is a fantasy in Carrie's imagination, and that you can't love a fantasy. And so we leave Carrie to enter a new phase in her life when she understands that she will have to find herself (without a man), and in doing so will hopefully be able to find a relationship.

Maybe I'm not as unsentimental as I thought.

Candace Bushnell

May 23, 2001

1

My Unsentimental Education: Love in Manhattan? I Don't Think SO. . .

Here's a Valentine's Day tale. Prepare yourself.

An English journalist came to New York. She was attractive and witty, and right away she hooked up with one of New York's typically eligible bachelors. Tim was forty-two, an investment banker who made about \$5 million a year. For two weeks, they kissed, held hands—and then on a warm fall day he drove her to the house he was building in the Hamptons. They looked at the plans with the architect. “I wanted to tell the architect to fill in the railings on the second floor, so the children wouldn't fall through,” said the journalist. “I expected Tim was going to ask me to marry him.” On Sunday night, Tim dropped her off at her apartment and reminded her that they had dinner plans for Tuesday. On Tuesday, he called and said he'd have to take a rain check. When she hadn't heard from him after two weeks, she called and told him, “That's an awfully long rain check.” He said he would call her later in the week.

He never did call, of course. But what interested me was that she couldn't understand what had happened. In England, she explained, meeting the architect would have meant something. Then I realized, Of course: She's from London. No one's told her about the End of Love in Manhattan. Then I thought: She'll learn.

Welcome to the Age of Un-Innocence. The glittering lights of Manhattan that served as backdrops for Edith Wharton's bodice-heaving trysts are still glowing—but the stage is empty. No one has breakfast at Tiffany's, and no one has affairs to remember—instead, we have breakfast at seven A. M. and affairs we try to forget as quickly as possible. How did we get into this mess?

Truman Capote understood our nineties dilemma—the dilemma of Love vs. the Deal—all too well. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Holly Go-

lightly and Paul Varjak were faced with restrictions—he was a kept man, she was a kept woman—but in the end they surmounted them and chose love over money. That doesn't happen much in Manhattan these days. We are all kept men and women—by our jobs, by our apartments, and then some of us by the pecking order at Mortimers and the Royalton, by Hamptons beachfront, by front-row Garden tickets—and we like it that way. Selfprotection and closing the deal are paramount. Cupid has flown the co-op.

When was the last time you heard someone say, “I love you!” without tagging on the inevitable (if unspoken) “as a friend.” When was the last time you saw two people gazing into each other's eyes without thinking, Yeah, right? When was the last time you heard someone announce, “I am truly, madly in love,” without thinking, Just wait until Monday morning? And what turned out to be the hot non-Tim Allen Christmas movie? *Disclosure*—for which ten or fifteen million moviegoers went to see unwanted, unaffectionate sex between corporate erotomaniacs—hardly the stuff we like to think about when we think about love but very much the stuff of the modern Manhattan relationship.

There's still plenty of sex in Manhattan but the kind of sex that results in friendship and business deals, not romance. These days, everyone has friends and colleagues; no one really has lovers—even if they have slept together.

Back to the English journalist: After six months, some more “relationships,” and a brief affair with a man who used to call her from out of town to tell her that he'd be calling her when he got back into town (and never did), she got smart. “Relationships in New York are about detachment,” she said. “But how do you get attached when you decide you want to?”

Honey, you leave town.

LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR, PART I

It's Friday night at the Bowery Bar. It's snowing outside and buzzing inside. There's the actress from Los Angeles, looking delightfully out of place in her vinyl gray jacket and miniskirt, with her gold-medallioned, too-tanned escort. There's the actor, singer, and party boy Donovan Leitch in a green down jacket and a fuzzy beige hat with earflaps. There's Francis Ford Coppola at a table with his wife. There's an empty chair at Francis Ford Coppola's table. It's not just empty: It's alluringly, tempt-

ingly, tauntingly, provocatively empty. It's so empty that it's more full than any other chair in the place. And then, just when the chair's emptiness threatens to cause a scene, Donovan Leitch sits down for a chat. Everyone in the room is immediately jealous. Pissed off. The energy of the room lurches violently. This is romance in New York.

THE HAPPILY MARRIED MAN

"Love means having to align yourself with another person, and what if that person turns out to be a liability?" said a friend, one of the few people I know who's been happily married for twelve years. "And the more you're able to look back, the more you're proven right in hindsight. Then you get further and further away from having a relationship, unless something big comes along to shake you out of it—like your parents dying.

"New Yorkers build up a total facade that you can't penetrate," he continued. "I feel so lucky that things worked out for me early on, because it's so easy not to have a relationship here—it almost becomes impossible to go back".

THE HAPPILY (SORT OF) MARRIED WOMAN

A girlfriend who was married called me up. "I don't know how anyone makes relationships work in this town. It's really hard. All the temptations. Going out. Drinks. Drugs. Other people. You want to have fun. And if you're a couple, what are you going to do? Sit in your little box of an apartment and stare at each other? When you're alone, it's easier," she said, a little wistfully. "You can do what you want. You don't have to go home."

THE BACHELOR OF COCO PAZZO

Years ago, when my friend Capote Duncan was one of the most eligible bachelors in New York, he dated every woman in town. Back then, we were still romantic enough to believe that some woman could get him. He has to fall in love someday, we thought. Everyone has to fall in love, and when he does, it will be with a woman who's beautiful and smart and successful. But then those beautiful and smart and successful women came and went. And he still hadn't fallen in love.

We were wrong. Today, Capote sits at dinner at Coco Pazzo, and he says he's ungettable. He doesn't want a relationship. Doesn't even want

to try. Isn't interested in the romantic commitment. Doesn't want to hear about the neurosis in somebody else's head. And he tells women that he'll be their friend, and they can have sex with him, but that's all there is and that's all there's ever going to be.

And it's fine with him. It doesn't even make him sad anymore the way it used to.

LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR, PART II

At my table at the Bowery Bar, there's Parker, thirty-two, a novelist who writes about relationships that inevitably go wrong; his boyfriend, Roger; Skipper Johnson, an entertainment lawyer.

Skipper is twenty-five and personifies the Gen X dogged disbelief in Love. "I just don't believe I'll meet the right person and get married," he said. "Relationships are too intense. If you believe in love, you're setting yourself up to be disappointed. You just can't trust anyone. People are so corrupted these days."

"But it's the one ray of hope," Parker protested. "You hope it will save you from cynicism."

Skipper was having none of it. "The world is more fucked up now than it was twenty-five years ago. I feel pissed off to be born in this generation when all these things are happening to me. Money, AIDS, and relationships, they're all connected. Most people my age don't believe they'll have a secure job. When you're afraid of the financial future, you don't want to make a commitment."

I understood his cynicism. Recently, I'd found myself saying I didn't want a relationship because, at the end, unless you happened to get married, you were left with nothing.

Skipper took a gulp of his drink. "I have no alternatives," he screamed. "I wouldn't be in shallow relationships, so I do nothing. I have no sex and no romance. Who needs it? Who needs all these potential problems like disease and pregnancy? I have no problems. No fear of disease, psychopaths, or stalkers. Why not just be with your friends and have real conversations and a good time?"

"You're crazy," Parker said. "It's not about money. Maybe we can't help each other financially, but maybe we can help each other through something else. Emotions don't cost anything. You have someone to go home to. You have someone in your life."

I had a theory that the only place you could find love and romance in

New York was in the gay community—that gay men were still friends with extravagance and passion, while straight love had become closed. I had this theory partly because of all I had read and heard recently about the multimillionaire who left his wife for a younger man—and boldly squired his young swain around Manhattan's trendiest restaurants, right in front of the gossip columnists. There, I thought, is a True Lover.

Parker was also proving my theory. For instance, when Parker and Roger first started seeing each other, Parker got sick. Roger went to his house to cook him dinner and take care of him. That would never happen with a straight guy. If a straight guy got sick and he'd just started dating a woman and she wanted to take care of him, he would freak out—he would think that she was trying to wheedle her way into his life. And the door would slam shut.

"Love is dangerous," Skipper said.

"If you know it's dangerous, that makes you treasure it, and you'll work harder to keep it," Parker said.

"But relationships are out of your control," Skipper said.

"You're nuts," Parker said.

Roger went to work on Skipper. "What about oldfashioned romantics?"

My friend Carrie jumped in. She knew the breed. "Every time a man tells me he's a romantic, I want to scream," she said. "All it means is that a man has a romanticized view of you, and as soon as you become real and stop playing into his fantasy, he gets turned off. That's what makes romantics dangerous. Stay away."

At that moment, one of those romantics dangerously arrived at the table.

A LADY'S GLOVE

"The condom killed romance, but it has made it a lot easier to get laid," said a friend. "There's something about using a condom that, for women, makes it like sex doesn't count. There's no skin-to-skin contact. So they go to bed with you more easily."

LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR, PART III

Barkley, twenty-five, was an artist. Barkley and my friend Carrie had been "seeing" each other for eight days, which meant that they would

go places and kiss and look into each other's eyes and it was sweet. With all the thirty-five year olds we knew up to their cuffs in polished cynicism, Carrie had thought she might try dating a younger man, one who had not been in New York long enough to become calcified.

Barkley told Carrie he was a romantic "because I feel it," and he also told Carrie he wanted to adapt Parker's novel into a screenplay. Carrie had offered to introduce them, and that's why Barkley was there at the Bowery Bar that night.

But when Barkley showed up, he and Carrie looked at each other and felt. . . nothing. Perhaps because he had sensed the inevitable, Barkley had brought along a "date," a strange young girl with glitter on her face.

Nevertheless, when Barkley sat down, he said. "I totally believe in love. I would be so depressed if I didn't believe in it. People are halves. Love makes everything have more meaning."

"Then someone takes it away from you and you're fucked," Skipper said.

"But you make your own space," said Barkley.

Skipper offered his goals: "To live in Montana, with a satellite dish, a fax machine, and a Range Rover—so you're safe," he said.

"Maybe what you want is wrong," said Parker. "Maybe what you want makes you uncomfortable."

"I want beauty. I have to be with a beautiful woman. I can't help it," Barkley said. "That's why a lot of the girls I end up going out with are stupid."

Skipper and Barkley took out their cellular phones. "Your phone's too big," said Barkley.

Later, Carrie and Barkley went to the Tunnel and looked at all the pretty young people and smoked cigarettes and scarfed drinks. Barkley took off with the girl with glitter on her face, and Carrie went around with Barkley's best friend, Jack. They danced, then they slid around in the snow like crazy people trying to find a cab. Carrie couldn't even look at her watch.

Barkley called her the next afternoon. "What's up, dude?" he said.

"I don't know. You called me."

"I told you I didn't want a girlfriend. You set yourself up. You knew what I was like."

"Oh yeah, right," Carrie wanted to say, "I knew that you were a

shallow, two-bit womanizer, and that's why I wanted to go out with you."

But she didn't.

"I didn't sleep with her. I didn't even kiss her," Barkley said. "I don't care. I'll never see her again if you don't want me to."

"I really don't give a shit." And the scary thing was, she didn't.

Then they spent the next four hours discussing Barkley's paintings. "I could do this all day, every day," Barkley said. "This is so much better than sex."

THE GREAT UN-PRETENDER

"The only thing that's left is work," said Robert, forty-two, an editor. "You've got so much to do, who has time to be romantic?"

Robert told a story, about how he'd recently been involved with a woman he really liked, but after a month and a half, it was clear that it wasn't going to work out. "She put me through all these little tests. Like I was supposed to call her on Wednesday to go out on Friday. But on Wednesday, maybe I feel like I want to kill myself, and God only knows how I'm going to feel on Friday. She wanted to be with someone who was crazy about her. I understand that. But I can't pretend to feel something I don't.

"Of course, we're still really good friends," he added. "We see each other all the time. We just don't have sex."

NARCISSUS AT THE FOUR SEASONS

One Sunday night, I went to a charity benefit at the Four Seasons. The theme was Ode to Love. Each of the tables was named after a different famous couple—there were Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker, Narcissus and Himself, Catherine the Great and Her Horse, Michael Jackson and Friends. Al D'Amato sat at the Bill and Hillary table. Each table featured a centerpiece made up of related items—for instance, at the Tammy Faye Bakker table there were false eyelashes, blue eye shadow, and lipstick candles. Michael Jackson's table had a stuffed gorilla and Porcelana face cream.

Bob Pittman was there. "Love's not over—smoking is over," Bob said, grinning, while his wife, Sandy, stood next to him, and I stood behind the indoor foliage, trying to sneak a cigarette. Sandy said she was about to climb a mountain in New Guinea and would be gone for

several weeks.

I went home alone, but right before I left, someone handed me the jawbone of a horse from the Catherine the Great table.

LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR; EPILOGUE

Donovan Leitch got up from Francis Ford Coppola's table and came over. "Oh no," he said. "I totally believe that love conquers all. Sometimes you just have to give it some space." And that's exactly what's missing in Manhattan.

Oh, and by the way? Bob and Sandy are getting divorced.