

I'm not robot!

By Candace BushnellCopyright © 2006 Candace BushnellAll right reserved.ISBN: 9780446617680Chapter OneMy 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 attractiveand witty, and right away she hooked up with one ofNew York's typically eligible bachelors. Tim was forty-two,an investment banker who made about \$5 million a year. Fortwo weeks, they kissed, held hands?and then on a warmfall day he drove her to the house he was building in theHamptons. They looked at the plans with the architect. "Iwanted to tell the architect to fill in the railings on the secondfloor, so the children wouldn't fall through," said thejournalist. "I expected Tim was going to ask me to marryhim." On Sunday night, Tim dropped her off at her apartmentand reminded her that they had dinner plans for Tuesday.On Tuesday, he called and said he'd have to take a raincheck. 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 waswhat 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. Noone's told her about the End of Love in Manhattan. Then Ithought: She'll learn. Welcome to the Age of Un-Innocence. The glittering lightsof Manhattan that served as backdrops for Edith Wharton'sbodice-heaving trysts are still glowing?but the stage is empty.No one has breakfast at Tiffany's, and no one has affairs toremember?instead, we have breakfast at seven A.M. and affairswe try to forget as quickly as possible. How did we getinto this mess? Truman Capote understood our nineties dilemma?thedilemma of Love vs. the Deal?all too well. In Breakfastat Tiffany's, Holly Golightly and Paul Varjak were faced withrestrictions?he was a kept man, she was a kept woman?butin the end they surmounted them and chose love overmoney. 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 atFortimers and the Royalton, by Hamptons beachfront, byfront-row Garden tickets?and we like it that way. Self-protectionand closing the deal are paramount. Cupid hasflown the co-op. When was the last time you heard someone say, "I loveyou!" without tagging on the inevitable (if unspoken) "as a friend." When was the last time you saw two people gazinginto each other's eyes without thinking, Yeah, right? Whenwas the last time you heard someone announce, "I am truly,madly in love," without thinking. Just wait until Mondaymorning? And what turned out to be the hot non-Tim AllenChristmas movie? Disclosure?for which ten or fifteen millionmoviegoers went to see unwanted, unaffectionate sex betweencorporate erotomaniacs?hardly the stuff we like to thinkabout when we think about love but very much the stuff ofthe modern Manhattan relationship. There's still plenty of sex in Manhattan but the kind of sexthat results in friendship and business deals, not romance.These days, everyone has friends and colleagues; no one reallyhas 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 tocall her from out of town to tell her that he'd be calling herwhen 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 IIIt's Friday night at the Bowery Bar. It's snowing outside andbuzzing inside. There's the actress from Los Angeles, lookingdelightfully out of place in her vinyl gray jacket and miniskirt,with her gold-medallioned, too-tanned escort. There'sthe actor, singer, and party boy Donovan Leitch in a greendown jacket and a fuzzy beige hat with earflaps. There'sFrancis Ford Coppola at a table with his wife. There's an emptychair at Francis Ford Coppola's table. It's not just empty. It'salluringly, temptingly, tauntingly, provocatively empty. It'sso empty that it's more full than any other chair in the place.And then, just when the chair's emptiness threatens to causera scene, Donovan Leitch sits down for a chat. Everyone inthe room is immediately jealous. Pissed off. The energy ofthe 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 happilymarried for twelve years. "And the more you're able to lookback, the more you're proven right in hindsight. Then youget further and further away from having a relationship, unlessomething big comes along to shake you out of it?likeyour parents dying. "New Yorkers build up a total facade that you can't penetrate," he continued. "I feel so lucky that things worked outfor me early on, because it's so easy not to have a relationshiphere?it almost becomes impossible to go back."THE HAPPILY (SORT OF) MARRIED WOMANA girlfriend who was married called me up. "I don't knowhow anyone makes relationships work in this town. It's reallyhard. All the temptations. Going out. Drinks. Drugs. Otherpeople. You want to have fun. And if you're a couple, whatare you going to do? Sit in your little box of an apartmentand stare at each other? When you're alone, it's easier," shesaid, a little wistfully. "You can do what you want. You don't have to go home."THE BACHELOR OF COCO PAZZOYears ago, when my friend Capote Duncan was one of themost eligible bachelors in New York, he dated every womanin town. Back then, we were still romantic enough to believethat some woman could get him. He has to fall in lovesomeday, we thought. Everyone has to fall in love, and whenhe does, it will be with a woman who's beautiful and smartand successful. But then those beautiful and smart and successfulwomen came and went. And he still hadn't fallen inlove. We were wrong. Today, Capote sits at dinner at CocoPazzo, and he says he's ungettable. He doesn't want a relationship.Doesn't even want to try. Isn't interested in theromantic commitment. Doesn't want to hear about the neurosisin somebody else's head. And he tells women that he'llbe their friend, and they can have sex with him, but that's allthere is and that's all there's ever going to be. And it's fine with him. It doesn't even make him sad anymorethe way it used to.LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR, PART IIAt my table at the Bowery Bar, there's Parker, thirty-two, anovelist who writes about relationships that inevitably growrong; his boyfriend, Roger; Skipper Johnson, an entertainmentlawyer. Skipper is twenty-five and personifies the Gen X doggeddisbelief in Love. "I just don't believe I'll meet the fight personand 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 corrupt?these days. "But it's the one ray of hope," Parker protested. "You hopeit will save you from cynicism." Skipper was having none of it. "The world is more fuckedup now than it was twenty-five years ago. I feel pissed off tobe born in this generation when all these things are happeningto me. Money, AIDS, and relationships, they're all connected.Most people my age don't believe they'll have a securejob. When you're afraid of the financial future, you don't wantto make a commitment." I understood his cynicism. Recently, I'd found myself sayingI didn't want a relationship because, at the end, unlessyou 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 donothing. I have no sex and no romance. Who needs it? Whoneeds 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 conversationsand a good time?" "You're crazy," Parker said. "It's not about money. Maybewe can't help each other financially, but maybe we can helpeach other through something else. Emotions don't cost anything.You have someone to go home to. You have someonein your life." I had a theory that the only place you could find love andromance in New York was in the gay community?that gaymen were still friends with extravagance and passion, whilestraight love had become closeted. I had this theory partlybecause of all I had read and heard recently about the multimillionairewho left his wife for a younger man?and boldlysquired 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, whenParker and Roger first started seeing each other, Parker got sick, Roger went to his house to cook him dinner and takecare of him. That would never happen with a straight guy. Ifa straight guy got sick and he'd just started dating a womanand she wanted to take care of him, he would freak out? Hewould think that she was trying to wheedle her way into hislife. 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 old-fashionedromantics?" My friend Carrie jumped in. She knew the breed. "Everytime a man tells me he's a romantic, I want to scream," shesaid. "All it means is that a man has a romanticized view ofyou, and as soon as you become real and stop playing into hisfantasy, he gets turned off. That's what makes romanticsdangerous. Stay away." At that moment, one of those romantics dangerously arrivedat the table.A LADY'S GLOVE"The condom killed romance, but it has made it a lot easierto 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 youmore easily."LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR, PART IIIBarkley, twenty-five, was an artist. Barkley and my friendCarrie had been "seeing" each other for eight days, whichmeant that they would go places and kiss and look intoeach other's eyes and it was sweet. With all the thirty-fiveyear olds we knew up to their cuffs in polished cynicism,Carrie had thought she might try dating a younger man, onewho had not been in New York long enough to becomecalcified. Barkley told Carrie he was a romantic "because I feel it,"and he also told Carrie he wanted to adapt Parker's novelinto a screenplay. Carrie had offered to introduce them, andthat's why Barkley was there at the Bowery Bar that night. But when Barkley showed up, he and Carrie looked at eachother and felt ... nothing. Perhaps because he had sensedthe inevitable, Barkley had brought along a "date," a strangeyoung girl with glitter on her face. Nevertheless, when Barkley sat down, he said, "I totallybelieve in love. I would be so depressed if I didn't believe init. People are halves. Love makes everything have moremeaning." "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. "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 fend up going out with are stupid." Skipper and Barkley took out their cellular phones. "Yourphone's too big," said Barkley. Later, Carrie and Barkley went to the Tunnel and lookedat all the pretty young people and smoked cigarettes andscarfed drinks. Barkley took off with the girl with glitter onher face, and Carrie went around with Barkley's best friend,Jack. They danced, then they slid around in the snow likecrazy people trying to find a cab. Carrie couldn't even lookat 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 youwere a shallow, two-bit womanizer, and that's why I wantedto go out with you." But she didn't. "I didn't sleep with her. I didn't even kiss her," Barkleysaid. "I don't care. I'll never see her again if you don't wantme to." "I really don't give a shit." And the scary thing was, shedidn't. Then they spent the next four hours discussing Barkley'spaintings. "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 beromantic?" Robert told a story, about how he'd recently been involvedwith a woman he really liked, but after a month and a half, itwas clear that it wasn't going to work out. "She put methrough all these little tests. Like I was supposed to call heron Wednesday to go out on Friday. But on Wednesday,maybe I feel like I want to kill myself, and God only knowshow I'm going to feel on Friday. She wanted to be with someonewho was crazy about her. I understand that. But I can'tpretend to feel something I don't. "Of course, we're still really good friends," he added. "Wesee each other all the time. We just don't have sex."NARCISSUS AT THE FOUR SEASONSOne Sunday night, I went to a charity benefit at the Four Seasons. The theme was Ode to Love. Each of the tables wasnamed after a different famous couple?there were TammyFaye and Jim Bakker, Narcissus and Himself, Catherine theGreat and Her Horse, Michael Jackson and Friends. AID Amato sat at the Bill and Hillary table. Each table featureda centerpiece made up of related items?for instance, at theTammy Faye Bakker table there were false eyelashes, blueeye shadow, and lipstick candles. Michael Jackson's table hada stuffed gorilla and Porcelana face cream. Bob Pittman was there. "Love's not over?smoking isover." Bob said, grinning, while his wife, Sandy, stood nextto him, and I stood behind the indoor foliage, trying to sneaka cigarette. Sandy said she was about to climb a mountain inNew Guinea and would be gone for several weeks. I went home alone, but right before I left, someone handedme the jawbone of a horse from the Catherine the Great table.LOVE AT THE BOWERY BAR: EPILOGUEDonovan Leitch got up from Francis Ford Coppola's tableand came over. "Oh no," he said. "I totally believe that loveconquers 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.Continues...Excerpted from Sex and the Cityby Candace Bushnell Copyright © 2006 by Candace Bushnell. Excerpted by permission. All rights reserved. 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