



IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

Candace Bushnell is a lot more interesting than Carrie Bradshaw, the alter ego she created who then eclipsed *her*. Now out with a new novel, in season two of her show *Lipstick Jungle*, and writing the prequel of *Carrie at 18*, Bushnell is about to steal her story back

By Andrew Goldman

If you found yourself roaming the halls of the Sirius Satellite Radio headquarters in Manhattan between 6 and 8 P.M. on a Thursday, peering through the soundproof glass windows of the dozens of studios lining the hallway, you'd come across one papered with photos of oldies radio fixture "Cousin Brucie" Morrow posing with famous people such as James Brown and Dolly Parton. Peering inside, you might be surprised that at the microphone is not the septuagenarian DJ whose hairpiece is its own legend. You'd instead see a very good head of blond hair, framed by a bulky pair of headphones atop a slight woman of 5'6". The hair is acknowledged to be so good that more than a decade ago, when she was writing the newspaper column "Sex and the City," whenever she encountered Donald Trump on the town, he'd mangle her name but shout, "Can-dayce! You got the best hair in New York."

Chances are that if you stuck around and watched for a minute, you'd be treated to a surprisingly good view of the back of her throat

when she shouts to make a point. Candace Bushnell was raised well enough to know not to yell across the table over lunch at the Four Seasons, but "on radio, you have to have a big personality," she explains. Thus, every minute or so, you would see her mouth and eyes wide open, arms and hands reaching high into the air—the exact expression bus drivers must see doomed pedestrians making in the split second before they're run over. (You would also see her guests wincing at what a huge sound such a slender woman can produce.) If you cracked the studio door to hear what was coming out of that mouth, you might think her patter sounded quite a bit like dialogue from *His Girl Friday*, had Rosalind Russell's vocal cords been seasoned with a moving truck full of Merit Ultra Lights. Bushnell may photograph like a Muffy, but she sounds like a Marge.

And if you'd been in that studio the last Thursday in June—just three weeks after the film *Sex and the City* made more than \$55 million in its first weekend, the biggest opening of any romantic comedy in history—you might have congratulated Bushnell on the

Photographed by Hilary Walsh (styling by Malina V. Joseph); hair by Seiji at the Wall Group; makeup by Mary Douglas at the Wall Group; dress: Robert Rodriguez; bracelet: Burberry; vintage earrings: Chanel; shoes: Bruno Magli

success of the movie, much like Liz Tuccillo, formerly a writer for the TV show *Sex and the City* and coauthor of the best-selling book *He's Just Not That Into You*, did upon sitting down as a guest on Bushnell's two-year-old Sirius show, *Sex, Success, and Sensibility*.

Then Bushnell, taking a long pull from the paper cup of white wine on ice that she customarily drinks while on air, would have proceeded to tell you what's what with the whole *SATC* deal (which so far surely must have netted somewhere in the neighborhood of a billion dollars). Creating and writing *Sex and the City* may have made her famous in Manhattan, but, as she says to Tuccillo, sounding like a weary waitress at the end of a double shift, "Sweetie, I don't get any money for the movie.... I have the *worst* contract. You've probably made more money off my work than I have."

"You mean you're not bathing in money?" Tuccillo asks. Bushnell dismissively sweeps a hand past the microphone; her producer, Kara; the COUSIN BRUCIE'S PLACE sign hanging above her head; and the whole bunch of us. "If I were rich, do you really think I'd be doing *this*?" she asks. Everyone in the studio joins her in rueful laughter.

Candace Bushnell is hardly a tragic figure in the vein of, say, Jerry Siegel, who, after cocreating the character Superman, sold his rights to it for \$65 in 1938, and then 40 years later had to watch from his lowly perch as a file clerk as *Superman* the movie went on to make \$290 million for other people. After her collection of *New York Observer* columns became the book *Sex and the City* in 1996, Bushnell sold the rights to Darren Star, the creator of *Beverly Hills 90210*, for "a little over" \$60,000, a figure she likes to describe as "honestly, after taxes, like, a hundred pairs of shoes." HBO made the pilot and aired the show for six seasons; then earlier this year, Warner Bros. and New Line released a movie so critically reviled, yet so financially successful, that it seems inevitable that producers will find a way to cough up at least one sequel.

Who better to guess how much Bushnell has made from lending her initials—and the stories of her life—to the show than the real Mr. Big, Ron Galotti (who didn't get a nickel for loaning his favorite word—*absofuckinglutely*—to actor Chris Noth). "Maybe all in she got seven figures," he says, "and I even think that would be stretching it." How could such a thing happen?

"Because it's not fuckin' fair," Galotti says. "It's like we used to say: 'You know what fair is? A thing for kids.'" For her part, Bushnell uses what might be a Samantha-ism to describe the situation: "It's a business where everybody takes it up the butt sooner or later."

So what if Carrie Bradshaw, not Candace Bushnell, got to sleep with Mikhail Baryshnikov and marry Mr. Big (who actually left Bushnell a decade ago and never looked back)? So what if Bushnell, a Connecticut blue blood with a pronounced prudish side, created a *Sex and the City* juggernaut that quickly took off without her? Her alter ego will always be Carrie, who is an emblem for a new sexual permissiveness among young women, many of whom hadn't yet been born when Bushnell bought her first pair of shoes.

Fourteen years ago, when she was 34, Bushnell started writing the column, a period that actually lasted only two years and produced 30 articles in all. In 1996, she transitioned to writing novels and has written four since. An hour-long drama based on her 2005 book, *Lipstick Jungle*, is returning this fall for a second season on NBC. Once bitten, twice lawyered to the gills: She gets an executive producer credit on the show and all the significant fees that come with that. And as for last year's spot of ugliness with Darren Star, who had at one point tried and failed to bring *Lipstick Jungle* to TV—and then, without telling Bushnell, pitched a remarkably similar concept to ABC called *Cashmere Mafia*? "I love Darren," she swears. She did not, however, call with condolences when ABC canceled his show.

Her newest novel, *One Fifth Avenue*, is published by Voice this

month, and Bushnell says in a matter-of-fact way, "I imagine it will be sold" to Hollywood. There's also the satellite radio gig; Sirius' programming head, Scott Greenstein, hired Bushnell with a wave of other female personalities such as Barbara Walters, *Sassy* magazine founder Jane Pratt, and Martha Stewart, all brought in to temper the fratty "No Girls Allowed" image projected by Sirius' star host, Howard Stern. Finally, there are the well-paying speeches she gives around the country about a dozen times a year, a lot of them

“When I first started writing the column, one of the big questions was, Can a woman go out there and have sex like a man?”



to women's business associations, at which she'll inevitably be approached by an unmarried woman who will inform her that she's famous for being the Carrie of her particular office. "I've met the Carrie of St. Louis, the Carrie of Des Moines," Bushnell says. "I've met them all."

The afternoon following the radio show, I find her seated at an outdoor table at Morandi, an Italian restaurant she's chosen for lunch in the West Village. A plume of smoke slowly rises from under the table; because of Manhattan's stringent antismoking laws, you're not allowed to light up at even an outdoor table anymore, so Bushnell is holding the cigarette out of sight, occasionally bringing it up to her lips for a furtive drag.

She is in a pair of big Italian sunglasses; her cream-color silk dress and leather bag, covered with brightly colored flowers, are both Balenciaga, she tells me. "These are last year," Bushnell is quick to add, as if to undermine any perception of extravagance. Then she gazes down at her deadly-looking black-and-white spike heels under the table. "The shoes are Valentino," she says, to demonstrate how impractical she is after all. "I love the shoes, I have to say. These are showy shoes."

The phenomenon of women wearing such shoes, the price of which (somewhere north of \$700) viscerally offends most men, is certainly something Bushnell had a hand in creating. Those thousands of gallons of vomited Cosmos? Partly her doing too. And if Candace Bushnell had not been born, would there really be a perpetual line in front of Magnolia Bakery on Bleecker Street, a line that Bushnell marvels at every time she drives into the city from her Connecticut country house, thinking, *They're just cupcakes, fercri-sakes*. But these are little cultural tics—Pet Rock equivalents—not the sort of thing that spurred MIT to offer a course called "Sex and the Institute" or a Northeastern Illinois University scholar to publish a paper called "Rereading *Sex and the City*: Exposing the Hegemonic Feminist Narrative."

A lot of very smart people would argue that *Sex and the City*, for better or worse, has acquired an almost liturgical importance in teaching women—particularly, impressionable young ones—sexual mores. I tell Bushnell that two years ago, while interviewing Lindsay Lohan, I mentioned I had no idea how many times a woman of her generation could sleep with a guy before she'd officially be dating him. "I don't [know] either," Lohan had replied, "but *Sex and the City* changed everything for me, because those girls would just sleep with so many people!" Is it possible that somehow

the certain louche attitude that seems to have taken over young Hollywood had its origins in her work?

"No, no, no," Bushnell says. "When I first started writing the column, one of the big questions was, Can a woman go out there and have sex like a man? And one of the things so interesting to me is that a lot of behavior is dictated less by gender and more by money, status, and power. Actresses in Hollywood have always had a lot of sex secretly. Why? Because they can. Because they're not reliant on a man to provide a roof over their head. That changes your sexual behavior." Exactly how does it do that? "Because if you're looking for a man to provide for you, you don't want to be seen as a woman who sleeps around. Men object to it because you're not viewed as wife material."

For the past six years, she's been married to Charles Askegard, who still, at 39, has the same job—principal dancer for the New York City Ballet—he had when Bushnell met him. Back then, she had just been dumped by her boyfriend of a year and a half, Stephen Morris, the wealthy British banker whom her friend Sarah Colleton, executive producer of the show *Dexter*, describes as "a great guy, but also a classic fun-reprobate and not someone we would have wanted her to marry." Bushnell and Askegard were married within eight weeks of meeting. At their wedding on the beach in Nantucket, she was photographed running and jumping into his arms. (Around a year later, the *New York Post* ran a photo of what appeared to be Askegard dropping her on her head on a red carpet. "She had a bit of an unfortunate expression on her face, but I did not drop her," Askegard says. "I've never dropped her.") Someone who's spent time with them describes him as "literally, the nicest man I've ever met," which is not something you might say of all of her exes. "She had one bad guy after another," Colleton says. "Let's face it." Only those who know her just from her books were surprised she didn't end up married to one of the megarich men who figured so prominently in her work. "It would never have made Candace happy to have been a rich man's wife," says Colleton.

"Oh, no," echoes Bushnell. "Being married to a rich man is a job. Like I always say, there's no free lunch. And I'd prefer to put it on my own American Express card."

Bushnell waited until she was 43 to marry. It's surprising, considering, as she says, "I never felt like I lacked for male attention." Also, if social scientists could quantify exactly what constitutes Manhattan-grade wife material, they might very well focus their search on Bushnell's hometown of Glastonbury, Connecticut. The small, woodsy community on the banks of the Connecticut River happens to be one of the wealthiest towns in the wealthiest state in America. Bushnell grew up there at a time when a nice girl would never think of dining at a friend's house without afterward sending her hosts a "bread and butter note"; kids were expected to be seen, not heard; parents practiced a sort of benign neglect. Says Bushnell, "A friend and I always joke that on snow days your mother bundled you up, opened the door, and stuck you outside. You were not to come home until you had frostbite."

Although Bushnell describes her stock as "scrappy New England farmers," the family name is recognized and esteemed in those parts. Bushnell Park in Hartford is named after her ancestor Horace Bushnell, a noted nineteenth-century theologian who established the first public park in America; another ancestor, David Bushnell, is credited with creating the first submarine used in combat, during the American Revolution. Candace grew up with two younger sisters, three horses, and a membership in Glastonbury's Pony Club, to which she proudly belonged in 1972, the year it won the prize as the finest Pony Club chapter in the country. Her father, an engineer at the aerospace firm Pratt & Whitney, has a patent on the first fuel cell used on the *Apollo* rocket. Her mother, who passed away three years ago, sold real estate and was well known in the community for her decorative ability to integrate fine antiques with adventurous colors like bright

orange. Says Bushnell of her parents' social lives: "It was like that movie *The Ice Storm*, with the women dressed up in those long dresses and hair up in buns. But without the swinging." She told me her childhood was "pretty idyllic" but then said this on her radio show, about growing up in Glastonbury: "Where I came from, it wasn't like parents would abuse their kids, but you'd get your mouth washed out with soap. You always got hit with the belt. All the mothers would say, 'Wait until your father comes home.' And fathers drank!... So, they have three gin and tonics or three martinis—because that was how much you drank—and then, you know, it was like hell. But nobody talked about it."

Neither she nor her sisters were allowed to date in high school—a restriction she's actually happy about in retrospect. "There's a freedom in that," she says. "It frees you from having to get caught up in all that boy-girl stuff that tends to, I don't want to say 'damage' women, but it throws you into a world of inequality where it's all about boys. I think you lose some of your independent kind of thinking when the girls are competing. It makes them very insecure. Look at women in their twenties and even thirties—they can barely handle casual sex and dating. I just don't think teenage girls are ready for it."

Instead, there was horseback riding, swim team, flashlight tag, tadpoles in jars. "This conversation is making me remember all these things that young Carrie would write about," Bushnell says. It turns out she's just signed a deal with HarperCollins to write two young-adult books tentatively titled *The Carrie Diaries*. "I love the idea of going back to that time and going into the head of a teenage girl who—and I don't want this to come out the wrong way—who in a way becomes an icon, who in the future becomes that really independent character." So Bushnell finished high school with her virginity intact? "Oh, God, yes!" she says.

By graduation she was desperate to get out of Connecticut, but her parents wouldn't allow her to go to school in New York City. So she decided to go to her father's alma mater, Rice University in Houston. She immediately became famous for throwing parties on that brainiac campus. During her sophomore year she went to a celebrity tennis tournament in Houston, where she met the late Gordon Parks, famous for both his *Life* magazine photography and his direction of the 1971 blaxploitation classic *Shaft*. At 19, after a year and a half in school, she ditched Houston to join Parks in New York. (So much for her parents' wishes; "When I was that age no one could tell me what to do.") There, she resolved she would become a novelist.

Surprisingly, she blanches when I mention the raunchiness of her new book. "If I had a choice," she says, "I probably wouldn't put in any sex because it's hard to write, and it's really only valuable if it's a reflection in some way of the character's personality. So I get asked now and again, 'Are you going to put in a sex scene?' And I have to be dragged kicking and screaming."

I note that the vast majority of sex in *One Fifth Avenue* is enjoyed only by older men, and only when they're with younger women.

"That's true," she says, shrugging unapologetically.

And the only portrait of a married couple is one in which the wife seems to loathe her failure of a husband. "Not really," she says. "Well, she loathes him in the way that sometimes women do loathe their husbands." Do that many women really loathe their husbands?

"Do I feel that way toward my husband?" she says, clarifying. "No. I feel the opposite."

In Bushnell's books, sex has never been all that sexy—it's frequently more a manifestation of dominance and power. On her radio show, she momentarily put herself in the minds of women who tolerate their husbands visiting prostitutes: "They're like, 'Hey, that's one less blow job that I have to give.'" Samantha Jones, in Kim Cattrall's portrayal, glides through the show either with a man between her legs or talking with relish about how she had to get one there. Samantha wasn't in fact a particularly defined character in Bushnell's columns. Who was defined, however, was the character of Jenny

Wilcox, a B-grade model who appeared in Bushnell's second novel, *4 Blondes*, as a woman who would choose her summer sex partner based on the size and location of his Hamptons house. Wilcox then got a novel of her own, *Trading Up*.

"I was still trying to work out the character of Samantha after *Sex and the City*," Bushnell says. "Janey Wilcox is in a sense the real Samantha. She's a classic borderline narcissist. It's more than a neurosis. It's a psychological disorder and part of it is a sense of fearlessness and bad judgment. Everybody else who is wild and crazy and fun in their twenties starts to settle down. Somebody with this particular disorder can't settle down, and their illness becomes more and more apparent."

As with all of her other novels, there are a few particularly loathsome characters trailing slime through the pages of *One Fifth Avenue*,

Says Mr. Big, "Without going into the specifics, she partied hard. Bret, Candace, McInerney. Wooh. This was a heavy crowd."

which chronicles the fictional goings-on under the roof of a very real 27-floor art deco co-op overlooking Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. (The *New York Post* recently reported that Sam Shepard and Jessica Lange, Blythe Danner, and Tim Burton and Helena Bonham Carter own apartments within.) No character, though, seems more deserving of being squashed by a falling chunk of masonry than the beautiful 22-year-old transplant from Georgia, Lola Fabrikant, who as written embodies the worst possible brew of youthful entitlement and lassitude, and spends the book attempting to sleep her way into permanent residence in the building. Lola's plan derives, Bushnell writes, from having seen every episode of *Sex and the City* "at least a hundred times." She's come to New York simply to find a lifestyle funded by "her own Mr. Big." When her father asks her why he should fork out \$6,000 monthly for her to live in a particular location, Lola mewls: "Carrie Bradshaw lived in the West Village." It seems the ultimate disparagement of what her strappy-sandal-wearing golem has wrought, though Bushnell seems at pains not to say so. But does she think that the younger members of her audience understand that Carrie Bradshaw is a 35-year-old woman who toiled very hard to get to the point where she could afford a roof over her head (if not the shoes)?

"No," she says. "They don't understand that."

"Everyone always thinks that Candace is one of the characters in her books," says Colleton, who was Bushnell's longtime housemate in rural Connecticut. "They think she lives this gilded life, stays out at parties all night long, and comes home and dictates her novel before she goes to bed. When she had a book due she would be in bed by nine and up at five A.M., working at her computer until she had her 10 pages. When she's working, she's the most disciplined person I know."

New York had always been a struggle. After packing up her stuff from Parks' apartment—the relationship lasted only a few months—she did a stint at HB Studio acting school, where Matthew Broderick went, followed by many auditions and exactly one callback, on a Burger King commercial. This realization followed: "I was abso-

lutely horrible." The \$200 monthly allowance her parents sent didn't go far: She bunked with four other girls who were aspiring actresses in a two-bedroom apartment on West 49th Street; one of them practiced her audition song, Dolly Parton's "Here You Come Again," so often that Bushnell cannot abide the song to this day. Once, a man idling at the curb assumed she was one of the prostitutes who bunked in the third-floor apartment above.

Over the years, a writing career emerged, starting with low-paying gigs for downtown magazines, followed by better-paying assignments for women's magazines, then a plum staff writing job for *Self* magazine, where she remembers laboring over squibs about mascara while adding to a collection of unfinished novels that piled up in her drawer. Meanwhile, she began a decades-long habit of staying out all night long. Her weekday nocturnal rambles usually



started with a late dinner at the real One Fifth, then down to TriBeCa to check in at the avant-garde Mudd Club, and then back uptown to make a predawn appearance at the epicenter of fabulousness, Studio 54. She met, as they say, everyone. Along with friends such as the novelists Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney, Bushnell acquired a reputation for being one of Manhattan's great party animals, a gal who could always be depended upon for conjuring trouble. She tells me a funny story about a mutual friend who one night found himself booted out of a moving taxi. "Oh, my God, it was hilarious," she says. Many anecdotes feature the word *shitfaced*. A friend of mine tells me a story about chatting with Bushnell at a party on a high-floor terrace, when Bushnell almost daintily turned her head, vomited to the ground below, and then resumed the conversation as though nothing had happened.

Fifteen years after her arrival in Manhattan, *The New York Observer*, the smart, quirky weekly paper printed on pink newsprint and run out of a cramped townhouse on the Upper East Side, entrusted Bushnell with starting a sex column. Initially, the column had a removed, anthropological bent. "Half of them looked like shrinks," she wrote in her first column about the caliber of man she'd observed at a sex club. "I'll never be able to go to therapy again without imagining a bearded fat man lying naked and glassy-eyed on a mat on the floor, getting an hour-long blow job. And still not being able to come." Quickly thereafter, the topics migrated to something more personally relevant: the fact that she and most of her girlfriends were single in their mid-30s and had no immediate plans to settle down. "This group of unmarried single women was a cause of national concern," she says. "In 1986, there had been a *Newsweek* cover story, a backlash piece about women who had decided in the '80s to have careers and now would never get married. It said that if you were single and over 40, your chances of getting married were equivalent to [those of] being blown up in a terrorist attack."

Her column started to be filled with horror stories provided by her friends, who were granted pseudonyms. It was suffused with both a real anxiety ("What happens to those women?") and a sneering contempt for men who were capitalizing on the glut of single

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leather Clarks we'd decided cleverly rejuvenated the classic. *Synecdoche*, the part for the whole; the saddest figure of speech.

And the living friends—most of us in black, instinctively respecting the challenge of how to rock it within the tradition's confines, dressed so carefully, so consciously. A few of us broached it beforehand: What are you going to wear? But the hugeness of the concept struck us into mumbling. We had to confront it privately, but you could tell we all thought it mattered.

Adam had once in high school developed an interest in Buddhism. He told me he wore Birkenstocks (we found great hilarity in forming a mental picture of this), baked whole-grain bread, and gave away some of the best of his old English porcelain teacup collection. He had an expression he came up with when he decided to disembark the Zen train: "Embrace the foulness." I like to consider myself a shallow deep person, and usually I thought he was too, but sometimes I accused him, when I felt shafted, of getting the balance wrong, of being a phony. But at his funeral, it occurred to me that maybe I had gotten the balance wrong. The urge in all his friends—many supremely fashionable, some nerds, some frumps—to attempt to dress for him, one last time, to dress, as it were, to impress, was giving us something to hold on to, was holding us up and holding us together.

I see him sometimes, walking away from me because he's double-booked again; it's circa 1999, he's in his bright red dress shirt and a '70s herringbone suit, listening to another insanely individual individual who died too young, Ol' Dirty Bastard, on his big headphones: "We some GQ, get fresh, live-a-lot niggas/ Let all the world know we be getting high!" Which part matters? Our spirit or our style? It is of a piece. Adam helped me face our unavoidable truth: We who can't help but see the surface live to dress and dress to live, and while you can, live it up. ●

IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

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women like the so-called toxic bachelors, who would never marry these women. Special scorn was reserved for the "modelizers" who wouldn't even bother buying a Nobu dinner for anyone over 22. "Last year, George got a 19-year-old model pregnant," she writes of one late-twenties millionaire. "He knew her for five weeks. Now they've got a nine-month-old son. He never sees her anymore. Here's what she wants: \$4,500 a month in child support, a \$500,000 life insurance policy, a \$50,000 college fund. I think that's a little excessive, don't you?" George asks. When he smiles, the tops of his teeth are gray.

It was during this period that Bushnell went to a party at the apartment of fashion designer Wolfgang Joop. Also there was Ron Galotti, the then-publisher of *Vogue* and twice-divorced, tough-talking onetime dater of model Janice Dickinson who walked across the room to introduce himself for the simple reason that she was, he explains, "just a hot-lookin' blond, I guess." So into "Sex and the City" the column comes Mr. Big—named thus because Bushnell thought he carried himself like a "Big Man on Campus." As historic as it might seem now, the relationship lasted all of 18 months.

"I probably talk to Candace as much as I talk to anybody in New York, if not more," Galotti tells me from his farm in North Pomfret, Vermont, where six years ago, after negotiating a hefty severance package, he packed up his wife and daughter and moved, bringing nary a cell phone or high-speed Internet connection. He did make it back to town for the *Sex and the City* movie

premiere and walked the red carpet with Bushnell. "She's a nice chick, a really good broad," he says fondly. Despite the truly wrenching breakup scenes Bushnell shared in the column—here's her last line about the relationship: "This was several weeks after Carrie had begged to be taken to a mental institution"—Galotti doesn't recall the affair in particularly operatic terms. "The only time we really ever fought was when I met my wife," he says. "That's when it became testy." The first version of Bushnell's book had been submitted before the breakup; "Carrie and Mr. Big are still together," reads the prologue. The relationship didn't last through the printing process. Bushnell remembers weeping over the first galleys of her book. "You can have all these ideas about where you're going to be when these big moments happen," she says, "but one of the lessons that one learns in life is that you're born alone and you die alone, and ultimately these are moments you have with yourself."

Why, I ask her, was she alone all those years? Why did it end with Galotti and so many other men? Was there something about the real Carrie that made marriage impossible? "I'd be doing my own thing. I would stay out until four, socializing, going to clubs," she says.

And men would want you to stay by their sides? "C'mon," she says, as if I already know the answer. "Think about what women want. Most women don't want to have a boyfriend who comes home at four in the morning. So, I guess in a way, I lived my life like a man."

Galotti concurs. "Without going into the specifics, Candace partied hard," he says. "If you take Bret, Candace, McInerney. Wooh. This was a heavy crowd." For the past three years—from approximately the time her mother died after a two-year battle with breast cancer—a late night for Bushnell has been 11 P.M. "It was a natural evolution," she says. "There are things now I'm much more interested in. It's hard to change, but you've got to go with it."

"Okay, I just read a book called *Pretty Little Liars*," Bushnell shouts into the phone one afternoon about a week after our lunch. She's talking about the young-adult novel written by Sara Shepard that her editor at HarperCollins had messaged over to give her an idea about what exactly young-adult fiction is before she sits down and tries to write it herself. "They're all having sex!" she says, sounding legitimately scandalized. "One has sex with her teacher. And one falls in love with her older sister's boyfriend. And I was like, 'Wooah! I don't remember high school like that.'" I'd been curious after our chat to know whether, in this day and age, when the gold standard for teen fiction is Cecily von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl*—a book that features rampant underage sex among Upper East Side teens—HarperCollins really wanted Candace Bushnell to pen a tell-all about Carrie Bradshaw's deepest thoughts on stable management and Capture the Flag strategy.

Bushnell had had a meeting with her editor since we'd last spoken. And the tadpoles and flashlight tag of her adolescence? "I think that was more from my childhood," she says. "Having a meeting with my editor, I realized, Yeah, there was some stuff there. You know they're always wondering about what do girls do..."

You mean sex?

"I did not have sex in high school!" she says. But now it's been decided, in powwowing with the editor, that the first book will cover Carrie's senior year in high school, and the second will chronicle her first year on her own in New York. Of course, anything can happen to a girl in the big city. ●

MOMMIES DEAREST

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ELLE: Grieving, as you describe it, sounds very solitary—write in a journal, take walks by yourself, find a place in your home to be alone. You warn that "people close to you" may undermine your efforts. Do you recommend not talking about the grieving process? Do people tend to talk about it too much?

KM: The key is finding the right people to talk about it with. Daughters do need to process it with others, but it's very common for those around you to say, "Get over it already"; "Don't be a victim"; "Don't live in the past." You need people who can give empathy and support, and not those get-over-it messages.

ELLE: You recommend that a daughter in recovery be around healthy friends, but don't similarly wounded people tend to bond?

KM: The healthier we become and the more we've built our own sense of self, the more we're drawn to healthier people. We unconsciously pull in people who are at the same emotional level we are. As we gain a greater sense of security, we attract and are drawn to healthier people—which is a good reason for recovery! Sometimes you outgrow old relationships, but it has to do with how you are internally. You're not necessarily dumping your old friends—it's more that you interact differently, have better boundaries, have more reciprocity, become less dependent or codependent.

ELLE: Did you, in your recovery, ever say, "Mom, you're a narcissist"? Or is this book the first such message?

KM: This is the first time I've said it. She does know. We've talked about generational narcissism, about my grandparents. But I'm still cautious about talking too much about her. I don't know if she'll read the book.

ELLE: Therapy works in ways that are often not quantifiable, but can you say something about the difference between the absolute trust a child has in a good, unconditionally loving parent and the cautious, earned trust of an adult relationship? Without experiencing the former, can you ever learn the latter? And why should you, if your mother wasn't trustworthy?

KM: If we didn't grow up with that bond of trust, it's tremendously hard to build. It's an issue that's always there as daughters recover. They get better at it because they trust themselves. The more we trust ourselves and our own abilities, the less we mistrust others, because we know we can deal with whatever comes up. The more you trust yourself, the more you recognize red flags that remind you of your mother.

ELLE: In the chapter subtitled "Trying to Win at Love Where I Failed with Mom," you write that most people who don't have intimate partners are "unhealthy loners" but that some have made a healthy decision to be alone. How can you tell the difference?

KM: It's what they're telling you and how, their level of contentment, whether they seem happy. Some loners don't want to be alone, like my example of "Marcia," who trusts no one but her dog. She would like to trust a person, but she's made the unhealthy decision not to be in a relationship. But others have made that choice from a place of self-fulfillment. Their choice isn't based on a deficit or another issue.

ELLE: A big theme in this book is image versus authenticity—the narcissistic mother is more concerned with "what the neighbors think" than