Sex and the City

by Candace Bushnell

chapter 10

Downtown Babes Meet Old Greenwich Gals

The pilgrimage to the newly suburbanized friend is one that most Manhattan women have made, and few truly enjoyed. Indeed, most come back to the city in an emotional state somewhere between giddy and destroyed. Here follows one such tale.

Jolie Bernard used to be an agent who handled rock bands at International Creative Management. Five years ago, when she wasn't stomping the globe in her cowboy boots, hanging out with rock stars and sometimes sleeping with them, she lived in New York, in a one-bedroom apartment decorated with black leather couches and a giant stereo system. She had long blond hair and a tight little body with big tits, and when she came home she had a million messages on her answering machine, and when she went out, she had money and drugs in her purse. She was kind of famous.

And then something happened. No one thought it would, but it did, which just goes to show that you can never tell about these things. She turned thirty-five and she met this investment banker who worked for Salomon Brothers, and before you knew it, they were married, she was pregnant, and they were moving to Greenwich.

"Nothing will change," she said. "We'll still get together all the time and you can come to visit us and we'll have barbecues in the summer."

We all said, Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Two years went by. We heard she'd had one rug rat, and then another. We could never remember their names or if they were boys or girls.

"Hey, how's Jolie?" I would ask Miranda, who was at one time Jolie's best friend.

"Dunno," Miranda would say. "Every time I call her, she can't talk. The sprinkler man is coming, or she caught the
nanny smoking pot in the laundry room, or one of the kids is screaming.

“Horrible. Just horrible,” we would say, and then we would forget about it.

And then, a month ago, the inevitable happened: Little white invitations bordered with tiny purple flowers arrived, summoning four of Jolie’s city friends to a bridal shower she was hosting at her house. It was being held on a Saturday at one P.M. – only, as Miranda pointed out, the most inconvenient time and the last thing you want to be doing with your Saturday afternoon. Schlepping to Connecticut.

“Jolie called and begged me,” Miranda said. “She said she wanted some of her city friends to come so it wouldn’t be too boring.”

“The kiss of death,” I said.

Still, the four women did agree to go – Miranda, thirty-two, a cable exec; Sarah, thirty-eight, who ran her own PR company; Carrie, thirty-four, some sort of journalist; and Belle, thirty-four, a banker and the only married woman of the group.

Old Greenwich, New Enemies

Of course, Saturday was the most beautiful day of the year so far. Sunny, seventy degrees. When they met up at Grand Central, everyone began complaining immediately about having to be stuck inside Jolie’s house on the most beautiful day of the year, even though, being dyed-in-the-wool city dwellers, none of them ever went outside if they could possibly avoid it.

The trouble began on the train. As usual, Carrie had gone to bed at four in the morning, and she was terribly hung over and kept thinking she was going to puke. Belle got into an argument with the woman in front of her, whose kid kept sticking its head over the top of the seat and sticking his tongue out at her.

Then Sarah revealed that Jolie was in A.A. – had been for three months – which meant there might not be cocktails at the shower.

Carrie and Miranda immediately decided they would get off the train at the next stop and go back to the city, but Belle and Sarah wouldn’t let them; and then Sarah told Carrie that she should probably join A.A. herself.
The train stopped in Old Greenwich, and the four women crammed into the back seat of a white and green cab.

"Why are we doing this?" Sarah asked.

"Because we have to," Carrie said.

"They just better not: have any trendy gardening tools lying around," said Miranda. "If I see gardening tools, I'm going to scream."

"If I see kids, I'm going to scream."


The cab pulled up in front of a white, Colonial-style house whose value had obviously been increased by the addition of a pointy slate roof and balconies off the second floor. The lawn was very green, and the trees that dotted the yard had borders of pink flowers around their bases.

"Oh, what a cute puppy," Carrie said, as a golden retriever raced barking across the lawn. But as the dog reached the edge of the yard, it was suddenly jerked back, as if yanked by an invisible rope.

Miranda lit up a blue Dunhill. "Invisible electric fencing," she said. "They all have it. And I bet you anything we're going to have to hear about it."

For a moment, the four women stood in the driveway, staring at the dog, who was now sitting, subdued but valiantly wagging its tail, in the middle of the yard.

"Can we go back to the city now, please?" Sarah asked.

Inside the house, half a dozen women were already sitting in the living room, legs crossed, balancing cups of coffee and tea on their knees. A spread was laid out: cucumber sandwiches, quesadillas with salsa. Sitting off to one side, unopened, untouched, was a big bottle of white wine, its sides covered in a film of moisture. The bride-to-be, Lucy, looked somewhat terrified at the city women's arrival.

There were introductions all around.

A woman named Brigid Chalmers, Hermes from head to toe, was sipping what looked like a bloody mary. "You guys are late. Jolie thought maybe you weren't coming," she said, with that particular breezy nastiness that only women can show to one another.
"Well, the train schedule," Sarah shrugged apologetically.

"Excuse me, but do we know you?" Miranda whispered in Carrie's ear. That meant as far as Miranda was concerned, it was war with Brigid from now on.

"Is that a bloody mary?" Carrie asked.

Brigid and one of the other women exchanged glances.

"Actually, it's a virgin mary," she said. Her eyes flickered in Jolie's direction for a second. "I did all that stuff for years. All that drinking and partying. And then, I don't know, it just gets boring. You move on to more important things."

"The only important thing to me right now is vodka," Carrie said, putting her hands to her head. "I've got the worst hangover. If I don't get some vodka ..."

"Raleigh!" said one of the women on the couch, bending around to peer into one of the other rooms. "Raleigh! Go outside and play."

Miranda leaned over to Carrie: "Is she talking to her dog or her kid?"

"Married Sex"

Miranda turned to Brigid. "So tell me, Brigid," she said. "What exactly is it that you do?"

Brigid opened her mouth and neatly inserted a quesadilla triangle. "I work at home. I've got my own consulting firm."

"I see," Miranda said, nodding. "And what do you consult on?"

"Computers."

"She's our sort of neighborhood Bill Gates," said another woman, named Marguerite, drinking Evian from a wine goblet. "Whenever we have a computer problem, we call Brigid, and she can fix it."

"That's so important when you have a computer," Belle said. "Computers can be so tricky. Especially if you don't use one every day." She smiled. "And what about you Marguerite? Do you have children?"

Marguerite blushed slightly and looked away. "One," she said a little wistfully. "One beautiful little angel. Of course, he's not so little anymore. He's eight, he's in that real-boy stage. But we're trying for another."
“Margie’s on that in-vitro trail,” Jolie said, and then, addressing the room, added, “I’m so glad I got my two over with early.”

Unfortunately, Carrie chose that moment to emerge from the kitchen sipping on a large glass of vodka with two ice cubes floating on the top. “Speaking of rug rats,” she said, “Belle’s husband wants her to get preggers, but she doesn’t want to. So she went to a drug store, bought one of those test kits that tell you when you’re ovulating, and the woman behind the counter was like, “Good luck!” And Belle was like, “No, no, you don’t understand. I’m going to use this so I know when not to have sex.” Isn’t that hysterical?”

“I can’t possibly be pregnant during the summer,” Belle said. “I wouldn’t want to be seen in a bathing suit.”

Brigid yanked the conversation back. “And what do you do, Miranda?” she asked. “You live in the city, don’t you?”

“Well, actually, I’m the executive director of a cable company.”

“Oh, I love cable,” said a woman named Rita, who was wearing three heavy gold necklaces and sporting a twelve-carat sapphire engagement ring next to a sapphire-encrusted wedding band.

“Yes,” Belle said, smiling sweetly. “We think of Miranda as our own little Bob Pittman. He started MTV, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” said Rita. “My husband is at CBS. I should tell him I met you, Miranda. I’m sure he’d — in fact, I was his assistant! Until everyone found out we were seeing each other. Especially since he was married at the time.” She and the other Connecticut women exchanged glances.

Carrie plunked down next to Rita, accidentally sloshing her with some vodka.

“So sorry,” she said. “I’m so damn clumsy today. Napkin?”

“That’s okay,” Rita said.

“It’s just so fascinating,” Carrie said. “Getting a married man. I would never be able to pull it off. I’d probably end up becoming best friends with his wife.”

“That’s why there are courses at the Learning Annex,” Sarah said dryly.

“Yeah, but I don’t want to take courses with a bunch of losers,” Carrie said.
dominatrix den dominerende, kvindelige part i et sadomasochistisk (S&M) forhold
gamely tappert
tiptoe liste
carpeted belagt
runner leber
marble marmor
save for med undtagelse af skimpý kort
humongous kæmpestor
scold skoide ud

“I know a lot of people who have taken courses at the Learning Annex. And they’re pretty good,” Brigid said.
“What was our favorite?” Rita asked. “The S&M course. How to be a dominatrix.”
“Well, whipping is just about the only way I can keep my husband awake,” Brigid said. “Married sex.” Lucy laughed gamely.

Suburban Surprise: Bidet
Carrie stood up and yawned. “Does anyone know where the bathroom is?”
Carrie did not go to the bathroom. Nor was she as drunk as she appeared to be. Instead, she tiptoed up the stairs, carpeted with an oriental runner, and thought that if she were Jolie, she would probably know what kind of oriental rug it was because that was the kind of stuff you were supposed to know if you were married to a rich banker and making him a home in the suburbs.
She went into Jolie’s bedroom. There was a thick white carpet on the floor and photographs everywhere in silver frames, some professional-looking shots of Jolie in a bathing suit, her long blond hair swinging over her shoulders.
Carrie stared at those photographs for a long time. What was it like to be Jolie? How did it happen? How did you find someone who fell in love with you and gave you all this? She was thirty-four and she’d never even come close, and there was a good chance she never would.
And this was the kind of life she’d grown up believing she could have, simply because she wanted it. But the men you wanted didn’t want it, or you; and the men who did want it were too boring. She went into the bathroom. Floor-to-ceiling black marble. A bidet. Maybe suburban husbands wouldn’t play ball unless their wives were just-washed, unlike guys in the city. Then she almost screamed.
There was a fourteen-by-seventeen color photograph of Jolie, Demi Moore-style, naked save for a skimpy negligee that was open in the front to reveal humongous tits and a huge belly. Jolie was staring proudly into the camera, her hand resting just above her belly button, which had been pushed straight out like a little stem. Carrie flushed the toilet and ran breathless down the stairs.
“We’re opening presents,” Brigid scolded.
Carrie sat down in a chair next to Miranda. “What’s your problem?” Miranda asked.

“Photograph. In the master bathroom. Check it out,” Carrie said.

“Excuse me,” Miranda said, leaving the room.

“What are you two doing?” Jolie asked.

“Nothing,” Carrie said. She looked at the bride-to-be, who was holding up a pair of red silk, crotchless panties bordered in black lace. Everyone was laughing. Which is what you do at showers.

“I’m Shaking”

“Could you believe the photograph?” Miranda asked. They were rocking gently on the train back to the city.

“If I ever get pregnant,” Belle said, “I’m going to stay inside for nine months. I will see no one.”

“I think I could get into it,” Sarah said moodily, staring out the window. “They’ve got houses and cars and nannies. Their lives look so manageable. I’m jealous.”

“What do they do all day? That’s what I want to know,” Miranda said.

“They don’t even have sex,” Carrie said. She was thinking about her new boyfriend, Mr Big. Right now, things were great, but after a year, or two years — if it even lasted that long — then what happened?

“You wouldn’t believe the story I heard about Brigid,” Belle said. “While you guys were upstairs, Jolie pulled me into the kitchen. ‘Be nice to Brigid,’ she said. ‘She just found her husband, Tad, in flagrante with another woman.’”

The other woman was Brigid’s next door neighbor, Susan. Susan and Tad both worked in the city and for the last year had carpooled to and from the train each day. When Brigid found them, it was ten in the evening and they were both drunk in the car, parked at the cul-de-sac at the end of the street. Brigid had been out walking the dog.

She yanked open the car door and tapped Tad on his naked bum. “Wheaton has the flu and wants to say good night to his daddy,” she said, then went back inside.

For the next week, she continued to ignore the situation, while Tad became more and more agitated, sometimes calling her ten times a day from his office. Every time he
tried to bring it up, she brought up something about their two children. Finally, on Saturday night, when Tad was getting stoned and mixing up margaritas on the deck, she told him. "I'm pregnant again. Three months. So we shouldn't have to worry about a miscarriage this time. Aren't you happy, dear?" Then she took the pitcher of margaritas and poured it over his head.

"Typical," Carrie said, cleaning under her fingernails with the edge of a matchbook.

"I'm just happy I can trust my husband," Belle said.

"I'm shaking," Miranda said. They saw the city, dusky and brown, looming up as the train went over a bridge. "I need a drink. Anyone coming?"

After three cocktails at Ici, Carrie called Mr. Big.

"Yo, yo," he said. "What up."

"It was awful," she giggled. "You know how much I hate those kinds of things. All they talked about was babies and private schools and how this friend of theirs got blackballed from the country club and how one of their nannies crashed a new Mercedes."

She could hear Mr. Big puffing away on his cigar. "Don't worry, kid. You'll get used to it," he said.

"I don't think so," she said.

She turned and looked back to their table. Miranda had shanghaied two guys from another table, one of whom was already in deep conversation with Sarah.

"Gimme shelter — in Bowery Bar," she said, and hung up.
Questions
1. Characterise the women in this text.
2. Account for the single women's attitude towards
   a) married life
   b) alcohol
   c) living in the suburbs
   d) having children
3. Is Carrie's attitude different from the other women's? If yes, how?
4. Why does Carrie react so strongly to the photograph in the bathroom?

For discussion
1. Could this story have been set in another city other than New York? Copenhagen, for instance?
2. Is the difference between living in the big city and the suburbs really as big as suggested in the text?
3. Discuss whether or not the photograph for the text arouses the same feelings in you as the one in the bathroom does in Carrie. If yes, why? If no, why not?
4. Can a photograph be a work of art? If yes, how?

Written assignment
Write an essay about the text and its photograph. Your analysis and interpretation should include the following aspects:
1. a comment on p. 7 ll. 4-7
2. Jolie's status among the women past and present
3. the relationship between Carrie and Mr Big
4. the interaction between the women at the bridal shower
5. the humour of the text
6. a comparison between the view of pregnancy conveyed in the text and the view of pregnancy conveyed in the photograph