

'SEX' AND THE SINGLE GIRL

THE TROUBLES of two little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. But when Manhattan newspaper columnist Candace Bushnell recently broke up with her boyfriend, *Vogue* magazine publisher Ron Galotti, gossip pages gave the news valuable space that might otherwise have been appropriated by Madonna's baby. Why? Because (a) Bushnell, 37, writes an arch, talked-about "sex" column in the weekly *New York Observer*, reporting about high-impact mating rituals from the chicest of New York's dating trenches; (b) she shows up in her pieces dolled up as "Carrie" and calls Galotti "Mr. Big"—all other

real names are similarly disguised; and (c) the breakup occurred just before publication of *Sex and the City* (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$21), a collection of those columns, for which movie rights have been optioned by *Melrose Place* Mr. Big (and author's pal) Darren Star. Oops. What's a confessional-style author to do?

"I'll probably write something about the breakup," Bushnell declares in a Manhattan hotel tearoom, getting down to business with a procession of Merit cigarettes. "What's a private life anyway? In New York City, everybody knows everything about everyone else, so what's the big deal?"

Apparently, for her, no biggie at all. In *Sex*,

Bushnell writes about "toxic bachelors" ("Let's face it," one character says, "the unmarried guys in New York suck"); "modelizers" ("they love [the girls] for their beauty and hate them for everything else"); life with her wheeler-dealer, cigar-smoking beau (he bought her some ski paraphernalia she wanted "in exchange for a blow job"); and a universe of tough city chicks like herself, who have reached "this place of complete independence where we had the luxury of treating men like sex objects."

Why such swagger from a Connecticut-raised Yankee? "I should have been married by now," she says with a shrug. "But I don't want to be with just any old *shmarly* guy." She shakes a hunk of honey-colored hair. "And I'm too busy thinking about my career. I guess I'm looking for the male version of me." Which, of course, means a guy who is happy to see details of his sex life in print. In New York? What's the big deal? —Lisa Schwarzbaum



WHAT ARE YOU WEARING? Bushnell covers her personal affairs

die CIA man—the protagonist of seven Clancy novels, beginning with *The Hunt for Red October*, as well as three films—has inherited the top job by default. Not that he's become a politician, understand. "It's all a...game here," he complains to his chief of staff, "and the object of the game isn't to do the right thing, the object of the game is to stay here."

No sooner does Ryan begin putting the government back together than America's foes begin to act up. The latest mad ayatollah mistakes him for a weakling, as do the leaders of India and China. Only Ryan's old enemies in the KGB recognize his formidable will and deadly razor.

Once the hero's bona fides are established, Clancy's convoluted plot lumbers along like a runaway freight train on a 2-percent grade—very slowly, but with impressive weight and momentum. For all of the author's bombastic rhetoric and the Tom Swift-meets-Charles Dickens sentimentality of his characters, there's an earnest, gee-whiz quality about the novel that's hard to dislike. (Whether it's movie material isn't clear: Paramount, which owns the Jack Ryan character, hasn't exercised its "first call" on the book.) When Clancy researches a topic—whether it's the care and feeding of the Ebola virus, the interpretation of satellite intelligence photos, or the performance capabilities of the M109A6 Paladin 155-mm mobile gun—he tells the reader all there is to know about it. Are the gadgets more interesting than the human characters? Always. Is the outcome a foregone conclusion? Absolutely. The way Clancy's millions of readers see it, that's part of the fun. **B**

Divine Vinyl

'Plastic' gets its due for a clearly lasting contribution

POOR OLD PLASTIC. Even its recent revival in the hands of retro-mad tastemakers has a bit of a kitschy, tongue-in-cheek sting to it. No one these days sincerely considers the stuff worthwhile.

No one, that is, but Stephen Fenichell. If he doesn't find the oft-maligned sub-