hot property

From **Candace Bushnell,** author of *Sex and the City,* comes a racy new novel about a premium address with a revolving door of delicious characters.

NEW YORK OBSERVER THE AUTHOR, AT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM AND SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS. DONNA KARAN DRESS AND MANOLO BLAHNIK SANDALS. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR ELGORT. SITTINGS EDITOR: ALEXANDRA KOTUR.

***Vogue:* What was the idea behind *One Fifth Avenue*?**

Candace Bushnell: It's about the new replacing the old and how the city goes on. Real estate is the perennial New York topic, as well as throughout America with the rise of McMansions. And in New York, which has always been a place of success and status, people need a way to distinguish themselves.

***Vogue:* How did you come up with the character of Lola?**

C.B.: I was trying to capture the Zeitgeist of a young woman today, the kind for whom starring in a reality show is a serious ambition. It's a rite of passage for a certain segment of young women to get breast implants, and they have a level of pampering and label awareness that is the culmination of the last 20 years of consumerism. But ultimately Lola is facing the realities that young women have always faced in the big city—how do I survive and what am I willing to do to survive?

***Vogue:* The Internet and blogging play a big role in the book.**

C.B.: Yes. Part of the book is about people dealing with this ever-present technology and the loss of privacy, where everybody's actions are recorded.

***Vogue:* How do you feel about the speculation about whom the characters are based on?**

C.B.: I find it amusing, but the characters are really just types. We all know a Philip Oakland. We know a Lola. We know her mother!

***Vogue:* Do you still feel attached to the characters from *Sex and the City*?**

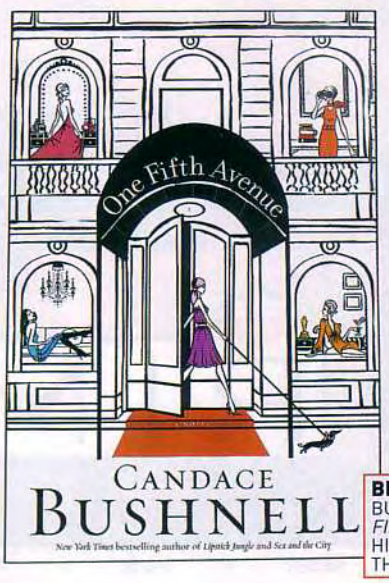
C.B.: I do! And I think other people do, too. I travel a lot on book tours, and I promise you, I've met the Carrie of Minneapolis, I've met the Carrie of St. Louis, I've met the Carrie of Cleveland. Every city has a Carrie.

***Vogue:* What has been your own real estate trajectory in New York?**

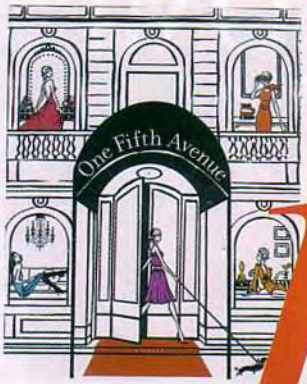
C.B.: I moved here 30 years ago, when it was much harder for renters to take in roommates. As a roommate, you couldn't get mail; you had to pretend you were the tenant's cousin. I lived in one place without a kitchen sink, and I didn't have a bed for a long time; I had to sleep on a piece of foam. Then, when I got married, my husband [New York City Ballet's Charles Askegard] and I bought an apartment.

***Vogue:* Has your husband taught you to dance?**

C.B.: [*Sigh*] He's tried. I'm just not graceful.—EVE MACSWEENEY *fiction* >430



BLOCK PARTY BUSHNELL'S *ONE FIFTH AVENUE* HITS BOOKSTORES THIS MONTH.



ONE FIFTH AVENUE

Lola Fabrikant sat on the edge of a love seat done up in unattractive nubbly brown fabric. She swung one sandaled foot as she flipped through a bridal magazine, studiously ignoring two other young women who were waiting to be interviewed. All three young women had long hair worn parted down the middle, with strands that appeared to have been forcibly straightened, although the color of the women's hair varied. Lola's was nearly black and shiny, while the other two girls were what Lola called "cheap blondes"; one even sported a half inch of dark roots. This would, Lola decided, briskly turning the pages of the magazine, make the girl ineligible for employment—not that there was an actual job available. In the two months after her graduation from Old Vic University in Virginia, where she'd gotten a degree in fashion marketing, Lola and her mother, Beetelle Fabrikant, had scoured the Internet, sent E-mails, and even made phone calls to prospective employers. In truth, Beetelle had done most of the actual work, with Lola advising, but nevertheless, Beetelle's efforts weren't easily rewarded. It was a particularly difficult time to find a job in fashion in New York City, with most of the positions taken by interns who spent their summer vacations angling for these jobs. Lola, however, didn't like to work and had chosen instead to spend her summers sitting by her parents' pool in a suburb of Atlanta, or the pools of her parents' friends, where she and a gaggle of girlfriends would gossip, text, and talk about their fantasy weddings.

But as her mother pointed out, adolescence couldn't go on forever, and as Lola wasn't engaged, finding the boys in her hometown and at the university nowhere near good enough—with which her mother agreed—it was decided Lola should try her luck in New York. Here, she would not only find interesting employment but meet a much more suitable class of male.

Lola had watched every single episode of *Sex and the City* at least "a hundred times," and adored the idea of moving to the city and finding her own Mr. Big. If Mr. Big weren't available, she would happily take fame, ideally becoming the star of her own reality show. Either option was acceptable, the result, she figured, being much the same: a life of pleasurable leisure in which she might indulge in all the usual pamperings and shopping trips and vacations with girlfriends—the only real difference from her current life being the possible addition of a husband and children. But her mother insisted she at least make an effort to work, claiming it would be good for her. So far, her mother had been wrong; the experience was not good at all, merely irritating and annoying. It reminded her of being forced to visit her father's relatives, who were not as well off as her own family, and who were, as Lola commented to her mother, "frighteningly average."

Having been blessed with the pleasingly uniform features of a beauty contestant—made more regular and pleasing by the subtle shaving of the cartilage on her nose—Lola considered herself most definitely not average and obviously superior. Unfortunately, in several interviews with the human-resources departments at various fashion magazines, her superiority had failed to impress, and when she was asked, "What do you want to do?" for the fifth or sixth time, Lola finally answered with a curt "I could probably use a seaweed facial."

Now, putting down the magazine and addressing the girl seated across from her—the one with the inch-long roots—Lola said, "How long have *you* been waiting?"

"An hour," the girl replied.

"It isn't right," the other girl said, chiming in. "How can they treat us like this? I've been on twelve job interviews in the last two weeks, and there's nothing. I even interviewed to be a researcher for Philip Oakland. And I don't know anything about research. I only went because I loved *Summer Morning.* But even he didn't want me. The interview lasted like ten minutes, and then he said he'd call and never did."

At this information, Lola perked up. She, too, had read *Summer Morning* and listed it among her favorite books of all time. Trying not to appear too keen, she asked slyly, "What did he want you to do?"

"All you basically have to do is look things up on the Internet, which I do all the time anyway, right? And then sometimes you have to go to the library. But it's the best kind of job, because you don't have regular hours, and you don't have to go to an office. You work out of his apartment, which happens to be gorgeous. With a terrace. And it's on Fifth Avenue. And, by the way, he is still hot, I swear to God, even though I normally don't like older men. And when I was going in, I ran into an actual movie star."

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fiction

SEX AND REAL ESTATE

Philip got a call from his agent. "Oh, these people," the agent said.

"What's the problem?" Philip asked. Despite his trouble with the material, he'd managed to turn in a draft of *Bridesmaids Revisited* the day before.

"I'm giving you a heads-up. The studio wants an emergency conference call this afternoon."

His agent hung up, and an assistant from the studio called. Then he was on hold for ten minutes, waiting for the head of the studio to get on. She had graduate degrees in both business and law, degrees that should have been irrelevant when it came to understanding the creative process, but now seemed to be the equivalent of having won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. "Philip," she said, not apologizing for keeping him waiting, "something happened between the last draft and the current one."

"It's called a rewrite," Philip said.

"We've lost something with the main character. She isn't likable anymore."

"Really?" Philip said.

"She has no personality," said the studio head.

"That's because you've insisted I take out anything that would give her personality," Philip said.

"We have to think about the audience. Women are very, very judgmental. As you know. They're harsh critics of other women."

"That's too bad," Philip said. "Maybe if they weren't, women would run the world."

"I'll need another draft in two weeks. Just fix it, Philip," she said, and hung up.

Philip called his agent. "Can I quit this project?" he asked.

"Forget your ego and just give them what they want. Then it's their problem."

Philip put the phone down, wondering, as he often did these days, what had happened to his courage.

His intercom buzzed. "Miss Lola Fabrikant is downstairs," the doorman, Fritz, said. "Shall I send her up?"

Damn, Philip thought. In the confrontation with the studio, he'd forgotten about his appointment with the girl who'd E-mailed him requesting an interview. He'd seen ten candidates for the job, and every one had been a disappointment. This girl would likely prove another waste of time, but she was already downstairs. He'd give her ten minutes just to be polite. "Send her up," he said.

"Who?" the second girl squealed.

"Schiffer Diamond. She was in *Summer Morning*. So I thought it had to be a sign that I was going to get the job, but I didn't."

"How'd you find out about it?" Lola asked casually.

"One of my mother's friends' daughters heard about it. After I didn't get the job, she had the nerve to tell her mother, who told my mother that Philip Oakland only likes to hire pretty girls, so I guess I wasn't pretty enough." She looked Lola up and down. "You should try for the Philip Oakland job," she said. "You're prettier than I am. Maybe you'll get it."

A few minutes later, Lola Fabrikant was perched on Philip's couch, attempting to be on her very best behavior. Philip Oakland was no longer as young as his author photo on the back cover of her tattered copy of *Summer Morning*, but he wasn't old, either, and he was certainly younger than her father, who would never wear a faded black T-shirt and Adidas tennis shoes and hair past his earlobes. Folded up in his chair, feet on his desk, Philip alternated between tapping a pen on a pile of papers and tucking his hair behind his ears. The girl who had given Lola his E-mail had been right—Philip Oakland was hot.

"Tell me about you," Philip said. "I want to know everything." He was no longer in a rush to get rid of Miss Lola Fabrikant, who was not what he'd been expecting and who, after his lousy day, was more than a welcome relief, almost like the answer to his prayers.

"Have you seen my Facebook page?" she asked.

"I haven't."

"I tried to look you up," she said. "But you don't have a page."

"Should I?"

She frowned at him as if concerned for his welfare. "Everyone has a Facebook page. How else can your friends keep up with you?" How else indeed, he thought, finding her charming. "Do you want to show me your Facebook page?"

She tapped quickly on her iPhone and held it out to him. "That's me in Miami." Philip stared at a photograph of a bikini-clad Lola standing on a small boat. Was he being seduced deliberately or inadvertently? he wondered. Did it matter?

Philip stared at a photograph of a bikini-clad Lola standing on a small boat. Was he being seduced deliberately or inadvertently? he wondered. Did it matter?

"And then there's my bio," she said, coming up behind him to tap once again on the small machine. "See? My favorite color: yellow. My favorite quote: 'My way or the Henry Hudson Highway.' My dream honeymoon: sailing on a yacht around the Greek Islands." She swung her long hair, and a strand touched his face. "Sorry." She giggled.

"It's very interesting," he said, handing the iPhone back to her.

"I know," she said. "My friends are always saying big things are going to happen to me."

"What kinds of big things?" Philip asked, noting her smooth, unblemished skin. Her presence was turning him into an idiot, he thought.

"I don't know," she said. She wouldn't have dared admit this uncertainty to any of the stern middle-aged women who had interviewed her, but Philip Oakland was different. He was like a real person, but better, because he was a celebrity. She sat back down on the couch. "I know I should know, because I'm 22, but I don't."

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SEX AND REAL ESTATE

"You're a baby," Philip said. "You have your whole life ahead of you."

She dismissed this by blowing a small puff of air through her lips.

"Everyone always says that, but it isn't true. These days you have to make it right away. Or you get left behind."

"Really?" Philip asked.

"Oh, yes," she said, nodding her lovely head. "Things have changed. If you want something, a million other people want it as well." She paused, holding out her sandaled foot and cocking her head to admire her black toenail polish. "But it doesn't bother me. I'm very competitive. I like to win. And I usually do."

Aha, Philip thought, suddenly inspired. This was what his character was missing in *Bridesmaids Revisited.* The unbridled confidence of youth. "So what is this job?" she asked. "What do I have to do? I won't have to pick up your dry cleaning or anything like that, will I?"

"Worse, I'm afraid," Philip said. "I'll expect you to do some research for me—but I'll also want you to be an assistant. When I'm on a conference call, you'll be on the other line and will take notes. If I make handwritten notes on a manuscript, you'll retype it. I'll expect you to read every draft before it goes out, checking for typos and continuity. And occasionally, I'll use you as a sounding board."

"Meaning?" Lola asked, tilting up her head.

"For instance," Philip said, "I'm working on a screenplay now called *Bridesmaids Revisited.* I'm wondering how obsessed a 22-year-old woman would be with her wedding."

"Haven't you ever seen *Bridezillas*?" Lola asked, flabbergasted.

"What's that?" Philip said.

"Omigod," Lola said, warming up to this discussion about reality shows, which was one of her favorite topics. "It's about these women who are totally obsessed with their weddings, to the point where they literally go crazy."

Philip tapped his pen on his hand. "But why?" he asked. "What's the big deal about getting married?"

"Every girl wants to get married now. And they want to do it while they're young."

"I thought they wanted to have careers and take over the world by 30."

"That was Gen Y," Lola said. "All the girls I know want to get married and have kids right away. They don't want to end up like their mothers."

"What's wrong with their mothers?"

"They're unhappy," Lola said. "Girls my age won't put up with unhappiness."

Philip felt an urgency to get back to work. He unfolded his legs from the desk and stood up.

"Is that it?" she said.

"That's it," he said.

She picked up her bag, a gray snakeskin pouch that was so large Philip guessed it must have been made from the entire skin of a boa constrictor. "Do I have the job?" she asked.

"Why don't we both think about it and talk tomorrow," Philip said.

She looked crushed. "Don't you like me?" she asked.

He opened the door. "I do like you," he said. "I like you very much. That's the problem."

When she was gone, he stepped out onto his terrace. His vista was south. A chunky, modern medieval landscape of gray-blues and terra-cottas lay before him. Just below was Washington Square Park, a patch of green populated with tiny people going about their business.

You must not do this, he scolded himself. You must not hire that girl. If you do, you'll sleep with her, and it will be a disaster.

But he finally had a grip on his screenplay. And gathering up his things, he headed out to the small library on Sixth Avenue, which was open until ten and where he could work uninterrupted.

> Lola tossed the magazines aside, bored. She realized that with Philip gone, there was something much more interesting to do: snoop

The next day, Philip Oakland accompanied his aunt Enid to a luncheon she had organized for 20 at the Village restaurant on Ninth Street. Philip was well acquainted with Enid's crowd, once New York's best and brightest. These people and their particular rituals—which included speaking to the woman on your right during the appetizer and the woman on your left during the main course; exchanging inside information on politics, business, the media and the arts; and, last, standing and speechifying during coffee—was so much a part of Philip's life that he barely noticed how ancient these movers and shakers had become.

The conversation was, as usual, impassioned, and turned to the upcoming elections and the impending recession. Seated next to his aunt was an aged man who held himself stiffly upright in his chair. A former senator and speechwriter for Jack Kennedy, he held forth on the differences between the Democratic candidates' oracular styles. The second course came—veal in a lemon butter sauce—and without missing a beat in the conversation, Enid picked up her knife and fork and began to cut up the senator's meat. Her act of kindness terrified Philip. As he looked around the table, the scene was all at once garish to him, a picaresque grotesquerie of old age.

He put down his fork. This was where his own life was headed; indeed, he was only a short hop away. His perceived reality panicked him, and everything that had recently gone wrong with his life came to the fore. There was trouble with his current screenplay; there would be trouble with the next one, if there was a next one, and if there was another book, he'd have trouble with that as well. Someday he'd be here, an impotent and insignificant windbag, needing someone to cut up his meat. And he didn't even have a woman to soothe him.

He stood up and made excuses. He had a conference call from Los Angeles that couldn't be avoided—he'd only just gotten the message on his BlackBerry. He made it only halfway down the block before he called Lola. Her casual hello made his heart race, and he covered it up by becoming more serious than he'd intended. "This is Philip Oakland." *(continued on page 790)*

ONE FIFTH AVENUE

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"What's up?" she said, although she sounded pleased to hear from him.

"I want to offer you the job. As my researcher. Can you start this afternoon?"

"No," she said. "I'm busy."

"How about tomorrow morning?"

"Can't," she said. "My mother's leaving, and I have to say goodbye."

"What time is she leaving?" he said, wondering how he'd gotten into this desperate-sounding exchange.

"I don't know. Maybe ten? Or eleven?"

"Why don't you come by in the afternoon?"

"I guess I could," Lola said, sounding uncertain. Sitting on the edge of the pool at Soho House, she dipped her toe into the warm, murky water. She wanted the job but didn't want to appear too eager. After all, even though Philip would technically be her employer, he was still a man. And in dealing with men, it was always important to keep the upper hand. "How's two o'clock?"

"Perfect," Philip said, relieved, and hung up the phone.

Back at Soho House, the waiter approached Lola and warned her that cell phones were not allowed in the club, even on the roof. Lola gave him an icy stare before texting her mother to tell her the good news. Then she slathered herself with more sunscreen and lay down on a chaise. She closed her eyes, fantasizing about Philip Oakland and One Fifth. Maybe Philip would fall in love with her and marry her, and then she'd live there, too.

The second Wednesday of Lola's employment found her stretched out on the couch in Philip's living room, reading tabloid magazines. Philip had gone to the library to write, leaving her alone in his apartment, where she was supposed to be reading the draft of his script, looking for typos. "Don't you have spell-check?" she'd asked when he handed her the script. "I don't trust it," he'd said. Lola started reading the script but then remembered it was the day all the new tabloid magazines came out. Putting aside the script, she went out to the newsstand on University. She loved going in and out of One Fifth, and when she passed the doormen now, she would give them a little nod, as if she lived there.

But the tabloids were dull that week—no major celebrities had gone to rehab or gained (or lost) several pounds or stolen someone's husband—and Lola tossed the magazines aside, bored. Looking around Philip's apartment, she realized that with Philip gone, there was something much more interesting to do: snoop.

She headed for the wall of bookcases. Three entire shelves were taken up with Philip's first book, *Summer Morning,* in various editions and languages. Another shelf consisted of hardcover first editions of the classics; Philip had told her that he collected them and had paid as much as $5,000 for a first edition of *The Great Gatsby,* which Lola thought was crazy. On the bottom shelf was a collection of old newspapers and magazines. Lola picked up a copy of *The New York Review of Books* dated February 1992. She flipped through the pages until she came upon a review of Philip's book *Dark Star.* Boring, she thought, and put it back. On the bottom of the pile, she spied an old copy of *Vogue* magazine. She pulled it out and looked at the cover. September 1989. One of the headlines read, THE NEW POWER COUPLES. What was Philip doing with an old copy of *Vogue*? she wondered, and opened it up to find out.

Turning to the middle of the magazine, she found out. There was a ten-page spread of a much younger Philip and an even younger Schiffer Diamond, standing in front of the Eiffel Tower, feeding each other croissants at a sidewalk café, strolling down a Paris street in a ball gown and a tux. The headline read, LOVE IN THE SPRINGTIME: OSCAR-WINNING ACTRESS SCHIFFER DIAMOND AND PULITZER PRIZE–WINNING AUTHOR PHILIP OAKLAND SHOW OFF THE NEW PARIS COLLECTIONS.

Lola took the magazine to the couch and studied the pictures more carefully. She'd had no idea Philip Oakland and Schiffer Diamond had once been together, and she was filled with jealousy. In the past week, she'd felt moments of attraction to Philip but had always hesitated because of his age. He was 20 years older. And while he looked younger and was in good shape—he went to the gym every morning—and there were tons of young women who married older celebrities—look at Billy Joel's wife—Lola still worried that if she "went there" with Philip, she might get a nasty surprise. What if he had age spots? Or couldn't get it up?

But as she flipped through the photo spread in *Vogue,* her estimation of him rose, and she began calculating how to seduce him. □

GEORGIANA ON MY MIND

(continued from page 644)

landscape. These little seminars were pure pleasure for me. I had forgotten that conversation was such fun.

On my last day, the director invited the whole family to take part in a London street scene. Carriages roared up and down, soldiers marched past, street sellers shouted their wares. The presence of so many horses and farm animals led my younger children to believe they were visiting some sort of zoo. Only Helena, my five-year-old, understood that she was dressing up to be in Mommy's movie.

At the end of the day we watched in awe as the perfect eighteenth-century set began to dissolve before our eyes. The animals were herded away with much squawking and squealing. The support crew swept up; the cables and lights were hauled away. The extras, wigs in hand, were ambling back to the tents. My tired children sat contentedly on the grass, getting ice cream all over their costumes, and my husband smiled at me with a look of pure pride across his face.

My sense of satisfaction only increased once I started reviewing the rushes. Keira Knightley was transcendent as the duchess, illuminating the screen every time she appeared, just as Georgiana had done in real life. She exuded exactly the right combination of spirit and sensitivity. All that remained for me to finish was my part in the documentary about the making of *The Duchess.* A month after the family's visit to the set, I traveled to Chatsworth, the palatial Devonshire estate in the north of England, to film a segment on Georgiana's letters.

I had not been to Chatsworth for ten years. But for one entire summer I had toiled silently among its subterranean archives as a continual circus of tourists paraded above my head. My plan for the documentary was to select four of Georgiana's most important letters and read them to the camera. It unnerved me to discover that I had retained a picture-perfect memory of the letters in question. The color, the feel, her handwriting—everything was as familiar as yesterday's newspaper.

For the first letter I chose one she had written immediately after her marriage, when she was a frightened teenager and unsure how to comport herself with the duke's grown-up friends. The second and third displayed a more mature Georgiana, whose handwriting had acquired the illegibility of adulthood. These offered glimpses into her relationship with Bess, as well as her spiral into gambling. I explained the circumstances and read out excerpts in a clear, level voice.

Then I came to the fourth letter, a farewell to her son written while she was in exile and about to give birth to Eliza. In an era when women routinely died in childbirth, Georgiana had good reason to fear that her children would never see her again. I had quoted extensively from the letter in my book. Instead of ink, Georgiana had used her own blood. It was a desperate attempt to convey to her children how much she loved them.