



Queen of Babble
a novel

MEG CABOT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Chapter One

Our indiscretion sometime serves us well

When our deep plots do pall

—William Shakespeare (1564-1616), British poet
and playwright

I can't believe this. I can't believe I don't remember what he looks like! How can I not remember what he looks like? I mean, his tongue has been in my mouth. How could I forget what someone whose tongue has been in my mouth looks like? It's not like there've been that many guys who've had their tongues in my mouth. Only, like, three.

And one of those was in high school. And the other one turned out to be gay.

God, that is so depressing. Okay, I'm not going to think about that right now.

It isn't like it's been THAT long since I last saw

him. It was just three months ago! You would think I'd remember what someone I've been dating for **THREE MONTHS** looks like.

Even if, you know, for most of those three months we've been in separate countries.

Still. I have his photo. Well, okay, you can't really see his face in it. Actually, you can't see his face at all, since it's a photo of his—oh God —naked ass.

Why would anyone send someone something like that? I didn't ask for a photo of his naked ass. Was it supposed to be erotic? Because it so wasn't.

Maybe that's just me, though. Shari's right, I've got to stop being so inhibited.

It was just so shocking to find it in my in-box, a big photo of my boyfriend's naked ass.

And okay, I know they were just goofing around, he

and his friends. And I know Shari says it's a cultural thing, and that the British are much less sensitive about nudity than most Americans, and that we should strive as a culture to be more open and carefree, like they are.

Also that he probably thought, like most men do, that his ass is his best feature.

But still.

Okay, I'm not going to think about that right now. Stop thinking about my boyfriend's ass. Instead, I'm going to look for him. He has to be here somewhere, he swore he'd be here to pick me up—

Oh my God, that can't be him, can it? No, of course it's not. Why would he be wearing a jacket like that? Why would ANYONE be wearing a jacket like that? Unless they're being ironic. Or Michael Jackson, of course. He is the only man I could think of who would wear red leather with

epaulets. Who isn't a professional break-dancer.

That CAN'T be him. Oh, please God, don't let that be him . . .

Oh no, he's looking this way . . . he's looking this way! Look down, look down, don't make eye contact with the guy in the red leather jacket with the epaulets. I'm sure he's a very nice man; it's a shame about his having to shop for coats from the 1980s at the Salvation Army.

But I don't want him to know I was looking at him, he might think I like him or something.

And it's not that I'm prejudiced against homeless people, I'm not, I know all about how many of us are really only a few paychecks away from being homeless ourselves. Some of us, in fact, are less than a paycheck away from being homeless. Some of us, in fact, are so broke that we still live with our parents.

But I'm not going to think about all that right now.

The thing is, I just don't want Andrew to get here and find me talking to some homeless guy in a red leather break-dancing jacket. I mean, that is so not the first impression I want to give. Not that, you know, it will be his **FIRST** impression of me, since we've been dating for three months and all. But it will be the first impression he'll have of the New Me, the me he hasn't met yet . . .

Okay. Okay, it's safe, he's not looking anymore.

Oh God, this is awful, I can't believe this is how they welcome people to their country. Herding us down this walkway with all these people **LOOKING** at us . . . I feel like I'm personally disappointing each and every one of them by not being the person they're waiting for. This is a very unkind thing to do to people who just sat on a plane for six hours, eight in my case if you count

the flight from Ann Arbor to New York. Ten if you count the two-hour layover at JFK—

Wait. Was Red Break-dancing Jacket just checking me out?

Oh my God, he WAS! Red leather jacket with the epaulets totally checked me out!

Oh God, this is so embarrassing. It's my underwear, I KNOW it. How could he tell? That I'm not wearing any, I mean? It's true I don't have any visible panty lines, but for all he knows, I could be wearing a thong. I SHOULD have worn a thong. Shari was right.

But it's so uncomfortable when they go up your—

I KNEW I shouldn't have picked a dress this tight to get off the plane in—even if I did personally modify it by hemming the skirt to above the knee so I'm not hobbled by it.

But for one thing, I'm freezing—how can it be this cold in AUGUST?

And for another, this silk is particularly clingy, so there's the whole panty line thing.

Still, everyone back at the shop said I look great in it . . . though I wouldn't have thought a mandarin dress—even a vintage one—would actually work on me, seeing as how I'm Caucasian and all.

But I want to look good, since he hasn't seen me in so long, and I did lose those thirty pounds, and you wouldn't be able to tell I'd lost all that weight if I got off the plane in sweats. Isn't that always what celebrities are wearing . . .