



Queen of Babble  
**IN THE BIG CITY**

**MEG CABOT**

**#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

# ~Lizzie Nichols Wedding Gown Guide~

Which type wedding gown best suits you?

If you are lucky enough to be tall and slender, you can pretty much get away with any type or shape of gown. That is why models are tall and slender—anything looks good on them!

But supposing you are one of the millions of women who isn't tall and slender? Which gown best suits you?

Well, if you are short, with a fuller figure, why not try a gown with an empire waist? The flowing silhouette will make your body look longer and more slender. That's why this style of gown was favored by both the ancient Greeks and the very fashion-conscious Josephine Bonaparte, Empress of France!

Lizzie Nichols Designs™

## Chapter One

It is still not enough for language to have clarity and content ... it must also have a goal and an imperative. Otherwise from language we descend to chatter, from chatter to babble, and from babble to confusion.

René Daumal (1908–1944), French poet, critic.

I open my eyes to see the morning sunlight slanting across the Renoir hanging above my bed, and for a few seconds, I don't know where I am.

Then I remember.

And my heart swells with giddy excitement. No, really. Giddy. Like, first-day-of-school-and-I've-got-a-brand-new-designer-outfit-from-TJ-Maxx giddy.

And not just because that Renoir hanging over my

head? It's real. Although it is, and not a print, like I had in my dorm room. An actual original work, by the impressionist master himself.

Which I couldn't actually believe at first. I mean, how often do you walk into someone's bedroom and see an original Renoir hanging over the bed? Um, never. At least if you're me.

When Luke left the room, I stayed behind, pretending like I had to use the bathroom. But really I slipped off my espadrilles, climbed onto the bed, and gave that canvas a closer look.

And I was right. I could see the globs of paint Renoir used to build up the lace he so carefully detailed on the cuff of the little girl's sleeve. And the stripes on the fur of the cat the little girl is holding? Raised blobby bits. It's a REAL Renoir, all right.

And it's hanging over the bed I'm waking up in...

the same bed that's currently bathed in sunlight from the tall windows to my left...sunlight that's bouncing off the building across the street...that building being the METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. The one in front of Central Park. On Fifth Avenue. In NEW YORK CITY.

Yes! I am waking up in NEW YORK CITY!!!! The Big Apple! The city that never sleeps (although I try to get at least eight hours a night, or my eyelids will get puffy, and Shari says I get cranky)!

But none of that is what's making me so giddy. The sunlight, the Renoir, the Met, Fifth Avenue, New York. None of that can compare to what's really got me excited...something better than all of those things, and a new back-to-school-outfit-from-TJ-Maxx put together.

And it's in the bed right next to me.

Just look how cute he is when he's sleeping! Manly



cute, not kitten cute. Luke doesn't lay there with his mouth wide open with spit leaking out the side, like I do (I know I do this because my sisters told me. Also because I always wake up to a wet spot on my pillow). He manages to keep his lips together very nicely.

And his eyelashes look so long and curly. Why can't my eyelashes look like that? It's not fair. I'm the girl, after all. I'm the one who is supposed to have long curly eyelashes, not stubby short ones I have to use an eyelash curler I've heated with a hair dryer and about seven layers of mascara on if I want to look like I have any eyelashes at all.

Okay, I've got to stop. Stop obsessing over my boyfriend's eyelashes. I need to get up. I can't lounge around in bed all day. I'm in **NEW YORK CITY!**

And, okay, I don't have a job. Or a place to live.

Because that Renoir? Yeah, it belongs to Luke's mother. As does the bed. Oh, and the apartment.

But she only bought it when she thought she and Luke's dad were splitting up. Which they're not now. Thanks to me. So she said Luke could use it as long as he needs to.

Lucky Luke. I wish MY mom had been planning on divorcing MY dad and bought a totally gorgeous apartment in New York City, right across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, that she now only planned on using a few times a year for shopping trips in the city, or to attend the occasional ballet.

Okay, seriously. I have to get up now. How can I stay in bed—a king-sized bed, by the way, totally comfortable, with a big white fluffy goose down-stuffed duvet over it—when I have all of NEW YORK CITY right outside the door (well, down the elevator and outside the ornate marble lobby), just

waiting to be explored by me?

And my boyfriend, of course.

It seems so weird to say that...to even think it. Me and my boyfriend. My boyfriend.

Because for the first time in my life, it's real! I have an honest-to-God boyfriend. One who actually considers me his girlfriend. He isn't gay and is just using me as a cover so his Christian parents don't find out he's really going out with a guy named Antonio. He isn't just trying to get me to fall so deeply in love with him that when he springs the idea of doing a threesome with his ex, I'll say yes because I'm so afraid he'll break up with me otherwise. He isn't a compulsive gambler who knows I have a lot of money saved up and can bail him out if he gets too deeply in debt.

Not that any of those things have happened to me. More than once.



And I'm not just imagining it, either. Luke and I are together. I can't say I wasn't a little scared—you know, when I left France to go back to Ann Arbor—that I might never hear from him again. If he hadn't really been that into me, and wanted to get rid of me, he had the perfect opportunity.

But he kept calling. First from France, and then from Houston, where he went to pack up all his stuff and get rid of his apartment and his car, and then from New York, when he got here. He kept saying he couldn't wait to see me again. He kept telling me all the stuff he was planning on doing to me when he did see me again.

And then when I finally got here last week, he did them—all those things he'd said he'd been going to.

I can barely believe it. I mean, that a guy I like as much as I like Luke actually likes me back, for a change. That what we have isn't just a summer fling.

Because summer's over, and it's fall now (well, okay, almost), and we're still together. Together in New York City, where he'll be going to medical school, and I'm going to get a job in the fashion industry, doing something—well, fashion-related—and together, we're going to make a go of it in the city that never sleeps!

Just as soon as I find a job. Oh, and an apartment.

But I'm sure Shari and I will find a charming pied-a-terre to call home soon. And until we do, I have Luke's place to crash, and Shari can stay in the walk-up her boyfriend Chaz found last week in the East Village (he rightfully refused his parents' invitation to move back into the house in which he grew up—when he wasn't being shipped off to boarding school—in Westchester, from which his father continues to commute to the city to work every morning).

And even though it's not on the best block, exactly,

it's not the worst place in the world, having the advantage of being close to NYU, where Chaz is getting his PhD, and cheap (a rent-controlled two bedroom for only two grand a month. And okay, one of the bedrooms is an alcove. But still).

And, okay, Shari's already witnessed a triple stabbing through the living room window. But whatever. It was a domestic dispute. The guy in the building across the courtyard stabbed his pregnant wife and mother-in-law. It's not like people in Manhattan go around getting stabbed by strangers every day.

And everyone turned out to be fine. Even the baby, who was delivered by the cops on the building's front stoop when the wife went into early labor. Eight pounds, six ounces! And okay, his dad is locked up in a prison cell on Rikers Island. But still. Welcome to New York, little Julio!

In fact, if you ask me Chaz is sort of secretly hoping we won't find a place, and Shari will have to

move in with him. Because Chaz is romantic that way.

And seriously, how fun would that be? Then Luke and I could come over, and the four of us could hang out just like we did back at Luke's place in France, with Chaz mixing Kir Royales and Shari bossing everyone around and me making baguette-and-Hershey-bar sandwiches for everyone, and Luke in charge of the music, or something?

And it could really happen, because Shari and I have had no luck on the apartment front so far. I mean, we've answered about a thousand ads, and so far the places are either snapped up before one of us can get there to look at them (if they're at all decent), or they're so hideous no one in their right mind would want to live there (I saw a toilet that was balanced on wooden blocks over an OPEN HOLE in the floor. And that was in a studio apartment in Hell's Kitchen for twenty two hundred dollars a month).

But it will be all right. We'll find a place eventually. Just like I'll find a job eventually. I'm not going to freak out.

Yet.

Oh! It's eight o'clock! I'd better wake up Luke. Today is his first day of orientation at New York University. He'll be attending the post baccalaureate premedical program there, so he can study to be a doctor. He wouldn't want to be late.

But he looks so sweet lying there. With no shirt on. And his tan so dark against his mother's cream-colored, thousand-count Egyptian cotton sheets (I read the tag). How can I—

Ack! Oh, my goodness!

Um, I guess he's already awake. Considering that he's now laying on top of me.



“Good morning,” he says. He hasn’t even opened his eyes. His lips are nuzzling my neck. And other parts of him are nuzzling other parts of me.

“It’s eight o’clock,” I cry. Even though of course I don’t want to. What could be more heavenly than just lying here all morning making sweet sweet love to my man? Especially in a bed under a real Renoir, in an apartment across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NEW YORK CITY!

But he’s going to be a doctor. He’s going to cure children of cancer someday! I can’t let him be late for his first day of orientation. Think of the children!

“Luke,” I say, as his mouth moves towards mine. Oh! He doesn’t even have morning breath! How does he do that? And why didn’t I jump up first thing and hurry into the bathroom to brush my teeth?

“What?” he asks, lazily touching his tongue to my lips. Which I’m not opening, because I don’t want him to smell what’s going on inside my mouth. Which appears to be a small party given by the aftertaste of the chicken tikka masala and shrimp curry from Balucchi’s that we had delivered last night, which was apparently impervious to both the Listerine and Crest with which I attempted to combat them eight hours ago.

“You have orientation this morning,” I say. Which isn’t an easy thing to say when you don’t want to open your lips. Also when there are a hundred and eighty pounds of delicious naked man laying on top of you. “You’re going to be late!”

“I don’t care,” he says, and presses his lips to mine.

But it’s no good. I’m not opening my mouth.

Except to say, “Well, what about me? I have to get

up and go look for a job and a place to live. I have fifteen boxes of stuff sitting in my parents' garage that they're waiting to send me as soon as I can give them an address. If I don't get it all out of there soon, I just know Mom's going to have a garage sale, and I'll never see any of it again."

"It would be more expedient," Luke says, as he plucks at the straps to my vintage teddy, "if you would just sleep naked, like I do."

Only I couldn't even get mad at him for not listening to a word I've said, because he manages to get the teddy off with an alacrity that really is breathtaking, and the next thing I know, his being late for orientation—my job and apartment search—and even those boxes sitting in my parents' garage are the last things on my mind.

A little while later he lifts his head to look at the clock and says, in some surprise, "Oh. I'm going to be late."

I am lying in a damp puddle of sweat in the middle of the bed. I feel like I've been flattened by a steamroller.

And I love it.

“I told you so,” I say, mostly to the girl in the Renoir above my head.

“Hey,” Luke says, getting up to head to the bathroom. “I have an idea.”

“You're going to hire a helicopter to pick you up here and take you downtown?” I ask. “Because that's the only way you're going to make it to your orientation on time.”

“No,” Luke says. Now he's in the bathroom. I hear the shower turn on. “Why don't you just move in here with me? Then all you'll have to do today is look for a job.”

He pops his head—his thick dark hair adorably mussed from our recent activities—around the bathroom door and looks at me inquisitively. “What do you think about that?”

Only I can't reply, because I'm pretty sure my heart has just exploded with happiness.