

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

# MEG CABOT

a novel

"Cabot will knock your socks off!"  
—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

she went all the way<sup>3</sup>

# Chapter One

## WEDDING SURPRISE OF THE YEAR

Hindenburg stars' red hot romance sparks controversy: Actors Bruno di Blase and Greta Woolston wed in media firestorm....

It blossomed on the set of Hindenburg, last year's mega- movie blockbuster, which broke all previous earnings records and garnered seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture: a romance that, unlike the relationship of the heroic characters the two stars portrayed on screen, many said would never last. Now two of the hottest stars in Hollywood have delighted fans by making their big-screen romance a reality....

“Yo.”

Officer Nick Calabrese stared down at the front page of the New York Post. The Post, man. The

freaking thing had made the Post. Even worse, the front page of the Post.

“Yo, a little help over here, please?”

Nick glanced at the other papers lining the front of the newsstand. The Daily News had it, too. Newsday. Even USA Today. About the only paper it hadn't made the cover of was the New York Times, and Nick was certain it would be in there somewhere. The Metro section, probably.

Jesus!

“Yo, Calabrese,” snarled Officer Gerard ‘G’ West, as he struggled to place handcuffs on a local junkie who was proving reluctant to come along quietly. “You gonna stand there readin’ the funnies, or are you gonna help me with this guy?”

Nick picked up a copy of the Post and strolled over to his partner, pointing to the picture of the attractive couple on the cover and tilting it so that

their struggling prisoner could see the photo, too.

“Look at this,” Nick said. “See this guy? The one in the tux? That’s my sister’s boyfriend. Or was.”

The junkie, peering at the photo, didn’t seem to notice when G used this momentary distraction to snap his cuffs into place.

“Get outta town,” the junkie said, in reference to the photo.

“No,” Nick said. “Really.”

Even G, still holding Richie by the arms, looked skeptical.

“Yeah,” he said, sarcastically. “And my sister’s dating Denzel Washington. C’mon, Tone. I wanna get a hashbrown down at the Ds. You know they stop servin’em after ten thirty.”

“I am telling you,” Nick said, holding the paper out so that the owner of the newsstand, who’d been looking on with interest, could see the photo, too. “That is my sister’s boyfriend. Two of ’em were livin’ together up until about a few months ago, and the rat went and married somebody else behind her back. Can you believe that?”

The newsstand owner replied, his Bangladeshi accent was so thick that his English was barely understandable, “No, sir, that I cannot believe.”

“She wrote that movie, you know,” Nick said to the newsstand owner. “My sister did. The one that made these two so famous.”

“You are shitting me, sir,” the newsstand owner said politely.

“No, I’m not,” Nick said. “I swear it. Lou wrote it as, you know, a whadduyacallit. A vehicle. For Barry.”

“Who is Barry, sir?” the newsstand owner wanted to know.

“This guy.” Nick pointed at the paper. “Bruno di Blase. That’s not his real name. That’s his, you know, stage name. His real name is Barry. Barry Kimmel. He grew up in our neighborhood out on the island. I used to make him eat bugs.” He noticed the disapproving look his partner sent him, and said, with a shrug, “Well, you know. We were kids.”

G, still holding onto the junkie, grunted. “Oh, yeah. Barry. I forgot. Tough break for Lou. Richie, you don’t stop squirming around, I swear to God--”

Richie, however, was having a hard time containing his excitement. “Hey, s’that really true?” the junkie asked Nick. “Your sister really shacked up with that guy from Hindenburg?”

“Watch it,” Nick growled. “My sister never shacked up with anybody, understand?”

“Well,” G said. “Not anymore, anyway. I mean, not now that the guy’s married to--”

“You watch it, too.” Nick flashed his partner a look of annoyance over the top of the diminutive Richie’s head while he dug into his pocket and extracted some change, which he tried to give to the owner of the newsstand in exchange for the copy of the Post he held beneath one arm.

“Oh, no, sir,” the newsstand operator said, graciously. “It is on the house. You are keeping our streets safe for law-abiding citizens.”

Nick, pleased, slipped the change back into his pocket. “Hey,” he said. “Thanks.”

“And please to tell your sister,” the newsstand owner called, “that I enjoyed her film, Hindenburg,

very much. As did my wife. It was truly a moving triumph of the human spirit.”

“Sure thing,” Nick said, as they moved towards the squad car. “Jesus, I still can’t believe it. Barry eloped on her! The poor kid.”

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## STAR STUDDED NUPTIALS

It happened in the newly created Hindenburg Room- featuring memorabilia from the hit movie of that name --in the Trump Casino in Las Vegas. Hindenburg stars Bruno di Blase and Greta Woolston tied the knot, just days after Ms. Woolston’s well-publicized split from longtime boyfriend, action-adventure star Jack Townsend.

Townsend, who rose to fame during his four year stint as the moody Dr. Paul Rourke on the hit television medical drama, STAT, and later went on to star as renegade detective Pete Logan in the

highly popular Copkillermovies, does not appear to have taken news of his ex's elopement in stride.

“Good Lord.” Eleanor Townsend looked down at the paper folded so neatly on the silver tray. “What is this, Richards?”

The butler cleared his throat. “I took the liberty, madam, of picking up a copy of the Post this morning as I was walking Alessandro. As you can see, there is a story on the first page that I believe will interest you.”

Eleanor, after flashing her butler of thirty years a look that was as affectionate as it was reproachful, reached over the yorkie perched on her lap, lifted the paper from the tray, and slipping on her spectacles, inspected the front page.

“Ah, yes,” she said, after scanning the article beneath the full color photo. “I see. How distressful. ‘According to sources at the Anchorage

Four Seasons Hotel, where Townsend is staying during location filming of Copkiller IV, the sound of breaking glass was heard from the star's suite shortly after news of the wedding was announced on the evening news," she read aloud. "By the time hotel security arrived, a French door had been shattered, several fist-sized holes were found in the hotel room walls, and a love seat had been set on fire.' Good heavens."

"There is no word," Richards said, "as to whether or not Master Jack was arrested."

"No." Eleanor perused the article. "No, it appears not. Fist-sized holes in the wall, indeed! And a love seat in flames? Jack would never have done anything so childish. Besides, he couldn't possibly have cared for the Woolston woman that much. She was so terribly...common. Though it's so difficult to tell when they have a British accent."

"It was, perhaps," Richards ventured, as he lifted a

silver coffee urn and refilled Eleanor's china cup, "not so much that she married so soon after their breakup, but to whom."

"Yes," Eleanor said, squinting at the photo on the paper's first page. "I see. Bruno di Blase. He played the hero in that movie everyone was talking about last year? The one about the...what is called again? Oh, yes. The blimp?"

"Indeed, madam," Richards said. "Hindenburg. A moving triumph of the human spirit, I am told."

Eleanor lifted a carefully groomed eyebrow. "Oh, dear. Di Blase. I wonder if he is one of the Tuscan di Blases. You know, that lovely family I met in Florence last spring?"

"I believe, madam," Richards said, after clearing his throat once, "that di Blase is a stage name."

Eleanor put down the paper with a shudder. "Oh,

Richards,” she cried. “How dreadful. That any woman should drop Jack for a man with a stage name--”

“I always rather suspected,” Richards said, evenly, “that Miss Woolston’s name might have been...well, improved upon, in some small fashion.”

Eleanor plucked her glasses from her nose and looked horrified. “No! But you might be right. It’s probably something dreadful. Doris Mudge, or Vivian Sloth, or some such.”

“Allegra,” Richards said, deliberately, “Mooch.”

Eleanor shuddered. “Stop. Not Allegra. Not before breakfast.”

“My apologies, madam. Shall we attempt to reach Master Jack, and see if we can be of aid?”

Eleanor examined her elegant gold watch. “No,

there isn't any point. He's impossible to reach most of the time, but especially when he's on location. And after something like this he won't get anywhere near a phone. Oh, Richards." She heaved a sigh. "It's starting to look as if it's going to be quite a long while before I ever see any grandchildren, doesn't it?"

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## CELEBRITIES SCORNED

Although Jack Townsend himself has yet to comment publicly on ex-girlfriend Greta Woolston's sudden elopement with Bruno di Blase, her Hindenburg co-star, the marriage appears to have been as big a shock to family and friends as to fans. Academy Award-winning Hindenburg screenwriter Lou Calabrese, longtime girlfriend of the new groom, has also yet to issue a public statement....

"Damned right we have no statement," Beverly Tennant snarled at the newspaper, which she then

threw, with savage force, in the general direction of her office's gilt trashcan. "Chloe," she bellowed. "Chloe!"

A harried-looking young woman came catapulting into the office, clearly having only just arrived, her earmuffs still on, her coat not yet unbuttoned, and two cups of steaming coffee in her hands.

"Oh," Beverly said, noticing the steaming cups. "For me?"

Chloe nodded, trying to catch her breath. "I...saw..." she panted, "the...headlines...on my way in. I figured you'd need...a double. I got non-fat foam."

"You are a lifesaver," Beverly said. She tapped on her desktop with a well-manicured nail. "Put it here. And hold all my calls. I'm going to try to get hold of her."

"Oh." Chloe hurried to place the steaming cup

where her employer had indicated. “Could you tell Lou hi from me? And tell her I’m really sorry. Tell her if it’s any consolation, none of us--here at the agency, I mean--think Bruno di Blase is as hot as everyone is making out. I mean...we don’t represent him, do we?”

Beverly, her fingers poised over speed dial buttons, sent her assistant a withering look.

“We do not,” she said. “But I will deliver your message. I’m sure it will be a great comfort to her.”

Chloe, abashed, hurried from the office, closing the door carefully behind her.

As soon as she was gone, Beverly, who’d slipped her feet from her Manolo Blahniks, leaned back and plopped her heels on her desk, peeled the lid from her cappuccino, and dialed her client’s Los Angeles number.

“Be there,” she muttered, as the first ring sounded.  
“Be there, be there, be there....”

Lou’s machine clicked on. “Hi. We’re not here right now, but if you leave a message at the tone, we’ll be sure to give you a call back real soon--”

Beverly winced at the use of the word ‘we.’ But there was nothing except sympathy in her tone as she cooed into the phone, “Lou, honey, it’s Bev. If you’re there, pick up. I know it’s--” She looked at her diamond chip-encrusted watch and made a swift calculation. “--six in the morning there, God, how can you stand it? But listen, sweetie, I’m telling you, this is the best thing that ever happened to you. Believe me, I’ve been there, I know. The man is pond scum. Worse than pond scum. He’s the scum that grows on...other scum.”

Satisfied with this description, Beverly went on, “And she’s just British white-trash. The two of them deserve each other. Where are you, anyway?”

Don't tell me you've gone all West Coast, and taken up jogging, or yoga, or something horrible like that....”

Beverly slid her heels off the desk and sat up straight in her swivel chair, as if struck by sudden inspiration. “Oh, God, that's right. You were headed up to the shoot today, weren't you, to talk Tim Lord out of blowing up that mountain and getting all those environmentalists' panties in a wad. God, what a dope I am. Here I am blathering to your machine and you're off in...God, the wilds of Alaska. I am so sorry. Alaska, of all places. I shudder to--”

Beverly shook herself. “But no, wait, that's good. It's good you're in Alaska, Lou. Alaska will keep your mind off...well, I don't suppose it will, actually, since Jack Townsend will be there, won't he? I know how you feel about him. God. Well, anyway, honey, call me. And as soon as you're back, we'll do lunch.”

Beverly hung up. She looked glumly down at her cappuccino. “Oh, God,” she said, to no one in particular, “Poor Lou. Right about now, I’ll bet she’s wishing she never wrote the thing in the first place.”

## Chapter Two

“Oh, God.” Lou Calabrese dropped her head to the sticky airport lounge table. “Why did I ever write the stupid thing?”

Vicky Lord, seated across the table, regarded her friend with an expression of concern on her carefully made-up face. “Lou, honey. You’re gettin’ ketchup in your hair.”

“What does it matter?” Ketchup or not, the tabletop felt cool against Lou’s forehead. “If I wanted to give him a vehicle, why didn’t I just buy him a Porsche?”

“Honey, lift up your head. You don’t know what

people might've been doin' on that table.”

“Sure, he'd still have driven away from me just as fast,” Lou went on, miserably, keeping her head where it was. “But every single person in the Western world wouldn't know about it. It wouldn't have been on CNN.”

“Now, Lou,” Vicky said. She opened her Prada handbag, which she'd kept carefully positioned in her lap so as to avoid condiment stains. “Not every single person in the Western world knows about Barry and Greta. I'm sure there's some of those hermits in Montana--you know, the ones with the bombs--who haven't heard about it.”

“Oh, God,” Lou wailed. “Why couldn't I have written a romantic comedy instead? They never would have gotten together on the set of a romantic comedy. It would have been too, you know. Predictable. Their publicists would never have allowed it.”

“Now, Lou, honey,” Vicky said again, as she dug through the contents of her purse. “You can’t blame it all on Hindenburg. You and Barry were having problems way before Hindenburg, if I remember correctly.”

Lou, not moving her head from the table, blinked at her friend. Morning sunlight was slanting in through the airport lounge windows, and a pinkish beam had settled on Vicky, who looked angelic in its rosy light.

But then, Vicky Lord always looked angelic. She hadn’t been the Noxzema girl for five years running just because of her flawless skin. Oh, no. Vicky glowed, and from the inside. In a way that Lou, who spent way too much time in front of a computer screen, knew she would never glow, inside or out.

“Sure,” Lou said. “Sure we were having problems. We’d been together for what, ten years? Ten years, and the guy wouldn’t commit. I’d say that was a problem.”

Lou didn't know why she felt compelled to explain herself to the angelic vision seated across from her. Vicky would never understand. Vicky, model, actress, and current Hollywood It Girl, had always gotten everything she had ever wanted.

Well, that wasn't quite true. There'd been one thing Vicky had wanted and hadn't gotten, a guy she'd been crazy about, who'd thrown her over the minute she, like Lou, had mentioned the C word. True, that had been years ago, and Vicky was happily married now-to a man who so thoroughly adored her, their marriage was routinely held up as one of the most successful in Hollywood. Yes, Vicky had moved on....But maybe-just maybe-she could still see where Lou was coming from.

“Barry told me the reason he couldn't commit to our relationship was because he didn't want me to be saddled with an out-of-work actor for a husband,” Lou said. “So I wrote something that I hoped would bring him some work.”

Vicky found what she'd been looking for in her purse--her Christian Dior compact. She opened it so that she could examine her newly Botoxed lips.

“Honey,” Vicky said, as she regarded her reflection. “You didn’t just write him something that would bring him more work. You wrote him something that turned him from Mr. Nobody to Mr. Eight Figures in about five minutes flat. And how did he reward you?” Vicky looked up from her compact and directed the full force of her azure-eyed gaze at her friend. “By runnin’ off with that blond ice-bitch. What I don’t get is why all of this is such a shock to you. I mean, he moved out way before this, didn’t he? How long ago?”

“Weeks ago.” Lou’s voice was mournful. “But he didn’t say anything about having fallen in love with somebody else. He just said he didn’t think he could commit after all.”

“When what he meant--obviously--was that he

couldn't commit to you. Honey, I've been there. Jack pulled the same old fast one on me, remember? Only in his case, he still hasn't seemed to find Ms. Right. Maybe because for him there is no Ms. Right." Vicky shook her head, and happened to spy the reflection of the terminal's coffee stand in her compact mirror. "Can you believe they don't have espresso here? I mean, I realize Anchorage is not LA, but it's still America, isn't it?"

"God!" Lou exclaimed. She lifted her head from the table, but kept her forehead in her hands. "When I think of everything I did for him! I tell you, writing that stupid thing was the worst mistake I ever made."

Apparently satisfied with her lipliner, Vicky closed her compact and slipped it back into her bag. "Taking up with Barry was the worst mistake you ever made," she said. "Writing Hindenburg was a stroke of genius. For heaven's sake, Lou, it's become an American classic."

“Classic piece of crap,” Lou said, bitterly.

“It was short on depth,” Vicky said, with a shrug. “I’ll give you that. But the action scenes were to die for. And those love scenes between Barry and Gret...” Lou didn’t miss Vicky shaking herself out of the thoughtful reverie into which she’d slipped. Biting her lower lip--ruining her liner as she did so--Vicky’s expression was guilty as she said, “Oh, God, hon. I’m sorry.”

“No.” Lou slumped in her hard plastic chair. “No, it’s all right. I can take it. I mean, it’s not like any of this is a total surprise. I certainly had my suspicions. Unlike some people.”

Vicky raised an eyebrow. “If you mean Jack,” she said, “he knew.”

Lou let out a bitter laugh. “Oh, come on, Vick. He did not. He had no clue.”

“About Greta and Barry?” Vicky shook her head until her bob shimmered. “I’m telling you, he knew. He’s not as dumb as you like to think, Lou.”

“He dumped you, didn’t he?” Lou demanded. “If that’s not the dumbest thing anybody ever did, I don’t know what is.”

“Aren’t you sweet,” Vicky said, with another of her beatific smiles. “But honey, I swear to you, he didn’t trash his hotel room because of Greta. I mean, for him to have been that upset, he’d have to have, you know. Cared about her.”

“And that’s a biological impossibility,” Lou muttered, “for someone who doesn’t even have a heart.”

As Vicky, one of the many starlets Jack had left in his wake, ought to have been able to attest to. The only man in Hollywood who’d had more affairs than Jack Townsend was Tim Lord, director of

both Hindenburg and this most recent Copkiller sequel....

But at least Jack did his conquests the favor of not marrying them and then dragging them forever through the divorce courts, something Tim Lord did on a fairly regular basis. Vicky was Tim's third wife. The man had an unfortunate tendency-not uncommon in Hollywood--to marry his leading ladies, and though Vicky's part in Hindenburg-as the wife of the doomed airship's captain-had been small, she'd nevertheless managed to steal the hearts of both audiences and the film's director.

Still, Vicky hadn't exactly jumped from the frying pan and into the fire going from Jack to Tim. She adored her new husband, while Tim was obviously smitten by her, whereas Jack....

Well, the day Jack Townsend cared for anyone whose name wasn't Jack Townsend was the day Lou would appear poolside at the Beverly Hills Hotel

wearing only a thong.

“Oh, look,” Vicky said, brightening. “Here comes someone who looks unwashed. Maybe he can tell us what’s taking so long with our ride.”

The unwashed gentleman did prove to be a member of their flight crew. He was, disconcertingly, their pilot.

“We’re just waiting on Mr. Townsend,” the burly, wool-capped individual informed them, politely, “and then we’ll be on our way.”

Lou was not certain she’d heard him correctly.

“Jack Townsend?” she echoed, hoarsely, her eyes going wide. “Did you say you’re waiting for Jack Townsend?”

The pilot was hard-pressed to drag his gaze from the effervescent Vicky, but he managed.

“That’s right, ma’am,” he said to Lou, before reluctantly--as, like all men, he was drawn to Vicky Lord’s ethereal beauty like a moth to a flame--shuffling off again.

“Oh, my God,” Lou said, clutching the tabletop with white-knuckled fingers. She glanced at Vicky, but the latter was busy pulling out her cell phone. Hesitantly, Lou asked, “Did you...did you hear what he just said, Vick?”

“What he said?” Vicky looked disgusted. “What about what he had on? Have you ever in your life seen so much plaid on one human being? Who wasn’t an extra in Braveheart, I mean?”

Lou blinked at her friend. It seemed incredible to her that Vicky could have just heard that the man who had torn her heart in two was on his way to this very airport, and yet all she seemed concerned about was outerwear of the locals.

But that was Vicky. It was one of the reasons Lou had remained friends with her for so long... Vicky could be utterly shallow at times, it was true, possessing a complete inability to pass by a designer shoe store without stopping in to make a purchase. But she had an equal weakness for those who were down on their luck, and was incapable of encountering homeless people without stopping to thrust hundred dollar bills into their hands.

“Jack’s going to be on our plane, Vicky,” Lou explained, because she wasn’t certain Vicky understood this. “Jack Townsend.”

“Well, of course,” Vicky said, distractedly. “Why shouldn’t my day be completely shot to hell? He must have missed the earlier flight, thanks to all that hoopla back at the hotel. Why isn’t this phone working? What is wrong with this godforsaken place? First no espresso, now this.”

“Vicky,” Lou hissed. She had to hiss because it

felt as if something was gripping her throat very tightly. Something...or someone. Lou's mind flew back to Hollow Man, starring Kevin Bacon, parts of which she'd watched in her hotel room the night before. Scientist becomes invisible and goes around terrorizing his colleagues....

Vicky, holding the cell phone to her ear, complained, "I don't understand what is going on here. Why can't I get a signal? Where the hell are we, anyway, Siberia?"

"Vicky." Lou's voice came back in full force, filled with wonder-and admiration. "How can you be so calm? The man stomped on your heartstrings, and you're about to get on a plane with him like it's...like it's nothing. Whereas I'm still ready to kill him for what he did to you. What's your secret? Really. I'm dying to know."

Vicky closed her cell phone with an impatient snap, then stuffed it back into her bag. "It's called acting,"

she said. “I swear, I should get an Academy Award for Outstanding Performance as Jack Townsend’s ex.” Then, glancing at her slim gold watch, Vicky made a face. Except that of course, even contorted, her features remained impossibly pretty. “If I’m going to schedule that lymphatic drainage massage, I have to call now.” Vicky stood up. “I’m going to find a payphone.”

“Vicky.” Fortunately, Lou hadn’t had any breakfast. If she’d had, she was fairly certain it would be coming back up right then. “I really think I’m going to be sick.”

“Oh, you are not,” Vicky said. “Go find the little girls’ room and wash that stuff off your head. The last thing you want if you’re going to tangle with Tim over that environmentalist thing is to show up at the set with ketchup in your hair.”

Spinning around on her slender stiletto heels, Vicky marched off, leaving Lou, white-faced and short of

breath, still gripping the tabletop.

“All right,” Lou said to herself. Fortunately, with the exception of the woman behind the counter at the coffee stand, she was the only person in the small, rundown private terminal, and so did not have to fear being overheard. “I can do this. I can get on a plane with Jack Townsend. If Vicky can do it, I can, easy. I just won’t speak to him. That’s all. I mean, just because his ex ran off with my ex, that’s no reason for things to change between us. I never spoke to him before, if I could help it. Why start now?”

Fortified by these assurances, Lou climbed to her feet and, shouldering her purse--and the much heavier bag containing her laptop--and found the door marked Women. The bathroom was not as bad as she’d thought it would be. The lighting over the sink was generous--a little too bright, actually. She could see the deep circles under her eyes only too well.

Wet paper towels applied to her unruly auburn curls solved the ketchup problem. The purple shadows under her eyes were going to be a more difficult fix. Lou fished a stick of concealer from her purse. Miraculously, it did the trick. Too bad, she thought, there was no concealer for her life. Ex-boyfriend causing you to suffer from low self-image? Just dab on a little of this, and voila! He's gone! It's like he never existed.

Concealer for emotional scars. Lou smiled at her reflection. That was a good one. Maybe she'd put it in her novel.

Then she stopped smiling. Lipstick. Definitely needed lipstick.

She found some at the bottom of her bag, and slicked it on. Even better. She was starting to look almost human. If she walked out of this restroom and ran into Barry, she doubted he'd be able to tell the emotional wreck he'd made her. Why, all

that running she'd done on her at-home treadmill, determined to sweat Barry out of her system, had actually given her some muscle tone. And the weight she'd lost after Barry had moved out-a direct result of a diet of nothing but peanut brittle, the only thing Lou had been able to keep down during that low period of her life-made her seem almost as ethereal as the third Mrs. Tim Lord.

Almost. But not quite. Because there was a hint of wariness in Lou's formerly trusting brown eyes-so like the gaze, her brothers had always asserted, of a Golden Retriever-that kept her appearance firmly rooted in earthly, not heavenly, stratum.

Now her eyes, Lou decided, were more like those of a Golden Retriever who'd survived an ingestion of anti-freeze.

Barry, she thought, those wary brown eyes narrowing in the mirror before her. It's all your fault, Barry.

Except that it wasn't. Lou knew perfectly well that if anyone was to blame for what had happened, it was her. She never ought to have fallen for Barry Kimmel in the first place.

For one thing, of course, Barry was an actor. And if Lou had learned anything in her years in LA, it was never to trust an actor. Never trust one, and never, ever, fall in love with one.

How was she to have known that, though, back in high school on Long Island? Although they'd grown up down the street from one another, Barry had never deigned to notice lowly Lou Calabrese until their senior year, when she'd finally managed to shed the layer of puppy fat she'd worn for most of her life, and convinced everyone to stop calling her Carrots by dyeing her copper-colored curls mahogany. Just like that, Barry Kimmel had asked her out. Barry Kimmel, the hottest boy in Bay Haven Central High School's Drama Club.

Hot, yes. And for a while-a long while-that had been enough. But even Lou, smitten as she'd been, had grown uneasy early into the relationship. Barry was gorgeous. No one could deny that.

But what about funny? Had Barry had the slightest trace of a sense of humor? No, not at all. Granted, few people shared the boisterous Calabrese family's enthusiasm for ribald jokes, but Barry had seemed to find them particularly offensive. Then again, since most of her brothers' pranks had centered around Barry, could Lou blame him, really, for not finding them funny?

And moody? If he did not think he was getting the attention he felt he deserved from whomever--his drama coach, the other actors, Lou--Barry had had a pronounced tendency to sulk. A lot.

Well, Barry was an artist, after all. No one, least of all Lou--or so Barry insisted--could understand the angst an actor went through with every new role,

trying to get to the core of his character, to find exactly the right intonation for each line. How Lou, a mere writer, could even dare to compare the two forms of creative expression--writing and acting--was beyond Barry. Writing, as everyone knew, was simply a craft. Acting, however, was art.

The saddest part of all was that for a long time, Lou had actually believed him.

But God, how handsome he'd been...a teen girl's walking fantasy of how a boyfriend should look. Barry had been Lou's Nevarre (Rutger Hauer, *Ladyhawke*), her Lloyd Dobbler (John Cusack, *Say Anything*), her Hawkeye (Daniel Day Lewis, *Last of the Mohicans*).

Her everything.

And the fact that he'd wanted her, chubby Carrots Calabrese...it had been a dream come true for a girl who'd always cared more for movies than she ever had for fashion or make-up. Barry Kimmel

had wanted her, Lou Calabrese, not Candy Sparks, cheerleading captain and star of every musical Bay Haven Central put on, or Amber Castiglione, homecoming queen and possessor of a professionally done portfolio of modeling headshots. It was a coup, Lou's landing Barry Kimmel, an almost unheard of victory for fat brainy girls everywhere.

Until now. Now, ten years later, it appeared that Candy and Amber had won after all. Because wasn't that who Greta Woolston was, really? Just a British version of Candy, a European Amber? Barry, saddled with a Lou all those years, had suddenly realized he didn't have to be. He could have all the Candy he wanted....

...now that he had his own money to pay for it, thanks to Lou, who'd foolishly provided him with the means to earn the kind of paycheck that attracted women like Candy...and Greta Woolston.

“You’ve gotten so cynical,” Barry had said to Lou, as he’d been moving out. “So hardened about everything.” This observation, Lou was fairly certain, was due to the fact that, rather than throwing herself prostrate at his feet and begging him not to go, she’d politely held the door open while Barry struggled past with a box filled with his CDs.

“I feel like the girl I moved to California with, the one filled with all those hopes and dreams,” he’d told her, “is gone.”

“Because she grew up, Barry,” Lou had said.  
“Thanks to you.”

Remembering the pain that had lanced through her as his words hit home--was it true? Was that why Barry had fallen for Greta? Because of her luminescent vulnerability, the appearance she gave of being completely incapable of taking care of herself, her almost palpable need for someone to

watch over her, a sensation Lou was fairly certain she had never aroused in any man?--Lou wrenched her gaze from her reflection.

“Stop it,” she whispered to herself. “Just stop it. Pull yourself together. You’re not Carrots Calabrese anymore. You’re not. You’re Lou Calabrese.” She straightened her shoulders and gazed into her own wary, weary eyes. “You’re an award-winning screenwriter, soon to be an award-winning novelist...”

...If she ever finished her novel, the first chapter of which she’d only just begun a few nights ago, about a woman betrayed by her high school sweetheart, and brought to wholeness again through the love of a good man....an entirely fictional creation since Lou was now convinced that, with the possible exception of her father and brothers, there was no such thing as a good man.

“When Greta Woolston can’t get a part because her

implants are hanging down to her knees,” Lou said to her reflection in the bathroom mirror, “you’ll still be writing. Your best asset isn’t made out of silicon. In the meantime, just remember this: no more actors. Now, cheer up.”

The pep talk didn’t work. Lou stared at the smile she’d plastered onto her newly glossed lips, then gave up. She couldn’t smile. But she couldn’t cry either. Maybe Barry had been right. Maybe she was too cynical.

Yeah, and maybe Jack Townsend hadn’t meant to break her best friend’s heart.

Disgusted, Lou spun around and threw open the door to the terminal....

And collided with Jack Townsend, who was standing by the coffee counter, looking absurdly at ease-and handsome--in jeans and a brown leather coat.

“Oh, there she is.” Vicky, having returned from her phone call, wore a faintly frantic expression. On Vicky, of course, even frantic looked gorgeous. “Look what the cat drug in, Lou. Well, I can see that you’ve discovered that for yourself.”

Jack Townsend looked up from the cup of coffee he had barely managed to keep from dropping, thanks to Lou’s graceless exit from the ladies’ room.

And the minute those cool blue eyes met hers, Lou felt her face turning a deep, burning umber. She’d long ago stopped dyeing her hair a darker shade than its natural auburn, since by the time she’d entered college, everyone seemed to have forgotten about the whole Carrots Calabrese thing.

But there were still times she yearned to be anything but a redhead, and now was one of them. She blushed often and easily...so easily that sometimes all she had to do was think about blushing, and she found herself doing it. The Excuse me she’d been

about to utter for having run into him died on her tongue. All ability to formulate even the simplest of sentences left her as heat consumed her face. Suddenly, Lou Calabrese was on fire.

But any woman, Lou told herself--not just a redhead whose ex-boyfriend had run off with his ex-girlfriend--would blush upon encountering Jack Townsend. That's because he was, not to put too fine a point on it, six foot two inches and two hundred pounds of hard muscle, all wrapped in an irresistibly long-limbed package. With his thick dark hair already turning noticeably grey in spots, and his nose which was no longer aquiline due, it was rumored, to a long ago prep school fight--the guy was one of the Manhattan Townsends, of Townsend Securities, born with a silver spoon in his mouth and legacies coming out of his finely sculpted rear end--Jack fell far short of being the teen heartthrob material Barry had always been. Barry--aka Bruno di Blase--was a bit of a pretty boy, truth be told. Jack Townsend would never, ever be

considered even remotely pretty...let alone a boy.

But he was good looking. More than good looking. With his piercing blue-eyed gaze and dark, invariably razor-stubbed jaw, Jack Townsend was, in the opinion of many a moviegoer, God's gift to heterosexual women everywhere. Even more astonishingly, he did not appear to know it: Not for Jack Townsend the Armani suits and leather pants Barry traditionally sported, or the Hollywood parties and clubs Barry haunted, in hopes (though Barry denied this) of paparazzi snapping his photo. Jack Townsend, when not working, kept to himself on his seventy acre ranch in Salinas, almost never appearing in public except to promote his next film...a fact Lou guessed had probably contributed to the dissolution of his relationship with press-hungry Greta Woolston more than anything else.

But Greta ought to have known that in taking up with Jack Townsend she was not aligning herself with a man comfortable with the trappings of

Hollywood stardom. Why, Jack Townsend, Lou knew for a fact, having witnessed the spectacle herself on more than one occasion, would not allow body doubles or even stuntmen to take his place during nude scenes or action sequences. And make-up? Not on Jack Townsend's face. No one touched that head, not even hairstylists...which explained the sprinkle of grey.

And the dark circles-so like her own-Jack Townsend currently sported under his eyes? Tim Lord was going to have to pay a fortune to have them removed after filming, frame by agonizing frame, since Jack would sooner eat glass than wear concealer, even for his closeups.

Yes, Jack Townsend was many things: a make-up artist's nightmare, a director's sure ticket to box office success, and just about every woman in America's dream date.

But one thing Jack Townsend was not, in spite of

his incredibly good looks and laid back charm, was one of Lou's favorite people.

And it was obvious by the look on Jack's face when she bumped into him that Lou's feelings of intense dislike were heartily returned. Jack glanced at Lou--seeming to look straight through her with those preternaturally blue eyes--then looked away again, and muttered, in that sardonic tone in which he said just about everything, "Oh. It's you."

Was it possible that this day, Lou wondered, which had not started out at all auspiciously, could get any worse?