

Chick Flicks

by CARRIE GERLACH CECIL

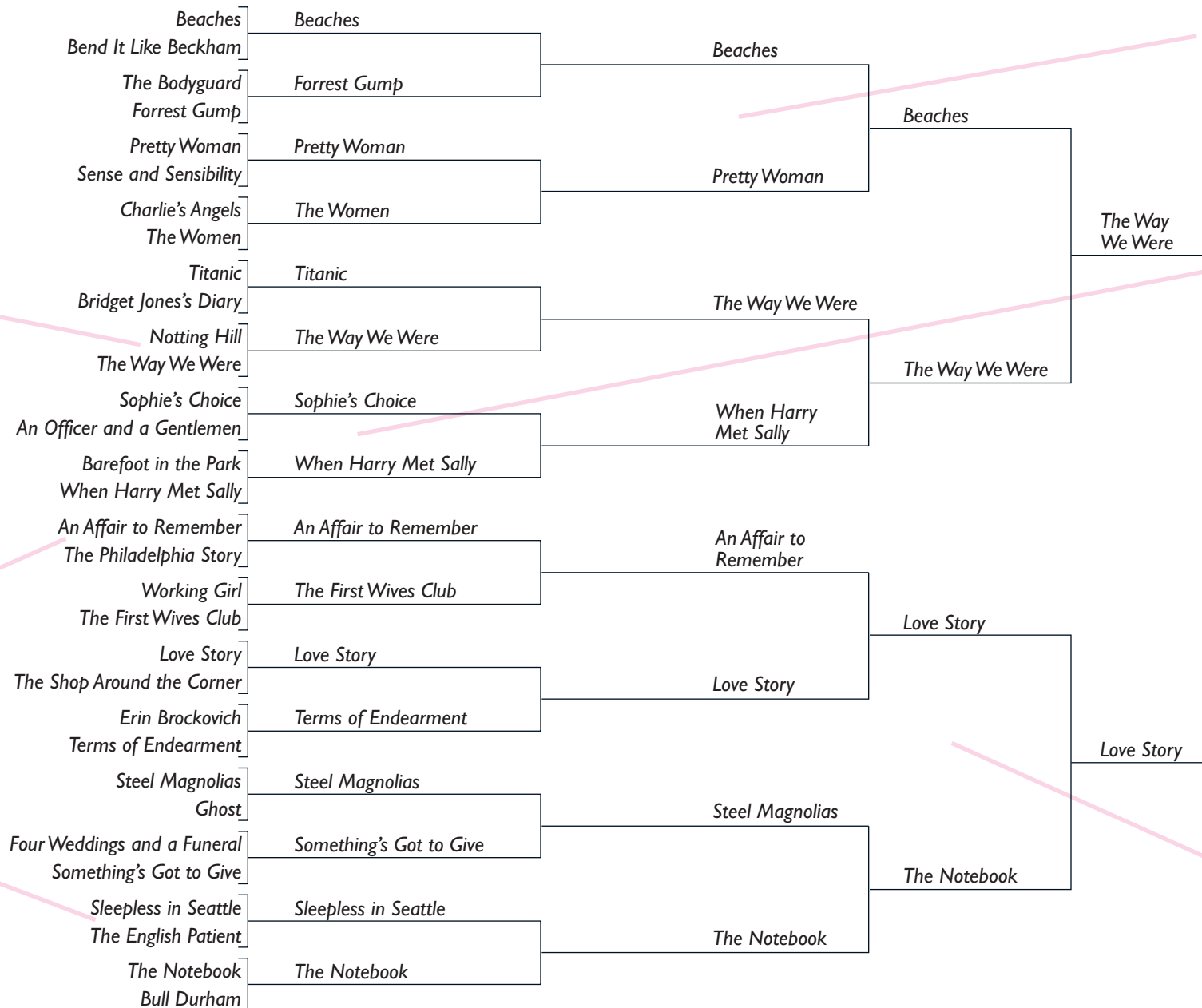
Any chick flick checklist includes: (1) an empowered female lead overcoming insurmountable relationship obstacles, (2) a real woman in search of a fantasy man who changes or comes back, (3) female friendship and bonding, (4) women kicking ass metaphorically and physically, (5) copious tears, (6) belly laughter, and (7) quotable lines that make it to the water cooler or into a wedding speech. In addition, you see your BFF (best friend forever), your ex, or yourself in it. It induces groans from guys when you rent it. There's a 30 percent chance that Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, or Hugh Grant is in it. And your mom loves it.

CARRIE GERLACH CECIL's first novel, *Emily's Reasons Why Not*, was adapted into a comedy for ABC, starring Heather Graham, of which she was a producer. She is married to Chuck Cecil, a former Pro Bowl safety and now a defensive coach for the Tennessee Titans. They have a daughter, Charli Alleene. *Sports Illustrated* once put Chuck on the cover, asking if he was "Too Vicious for the NFL?" Yet he quotes *Forrest Gump* lines and stops switching radio stations when "The Wind Beneath My Wings" is playing. Carrie is currently at work on her second novel and two television pilots.

With two chick-flick staples—Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant—you'd think the smartly written *Notting Hill* would get out of the early rounds. But even ultra-sappy lines like "Don't forget, I'm also just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her" can't beat Babs and Bob.

Two black-and-white beauties with Cary Grant. *Philadelphia Story* has the sophisticated talk, but *Affair* goes straight to the cardiovascular system. It even gets a featured role in *Sleepless in Seattle*.

So what if Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* won the Oscar? Ralph Fiennes's war-scarred lover is not as sappy as Tom Hanks's lovable widower in *Sleepless in Seattle*. The Golden Kleenex to Meg Ryan and Hanks for being the dominant chick-flick couple of the 1990s.



Despite the high-wattage smile of Julia Roberts, *Pretty Woman*'s hooker with a heart of gold hits the pavement hard when *Beaches*' Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey prove that a dying BFF can keep on living.

"No, I can't choose, please don't make me choose," Meryl Streep's famous line, yields to Billy Crystal's witty banter about whether men and women can be friends. Meg Ryan's fake orgasm scene left even Rob Reiner's mom wanting more.

No surprise that it's down to two films with poor-girl, rich-guy plots. But *The Way We Were* generated tears and heartbreak within an ambitious story, from Beekman Place to Hollywood, World War II to McCarthyism. It made women believe that a girl who feels "I'm not pretty enough for you, am I?" can get the guy, then leave him and walk on with her head held high. Babs singing the movie's hit has a big edge over Francis Lai's gooey *Love Story* score. Bonus points for never ruining the effect with a sorry sequel (*Oliver's Story*). But in the end, star power makes the difference: Ryan O'Neal and Ali MacGraw are no match for Redford and Streisand.

The Notebook didn't make me sob enough until Gena Rowlands and James Garner croak in a nursing home. *Love Story*'s Jenny dying in a hospital after a hello, happy-time pregnancy test is more gut-wrenching.