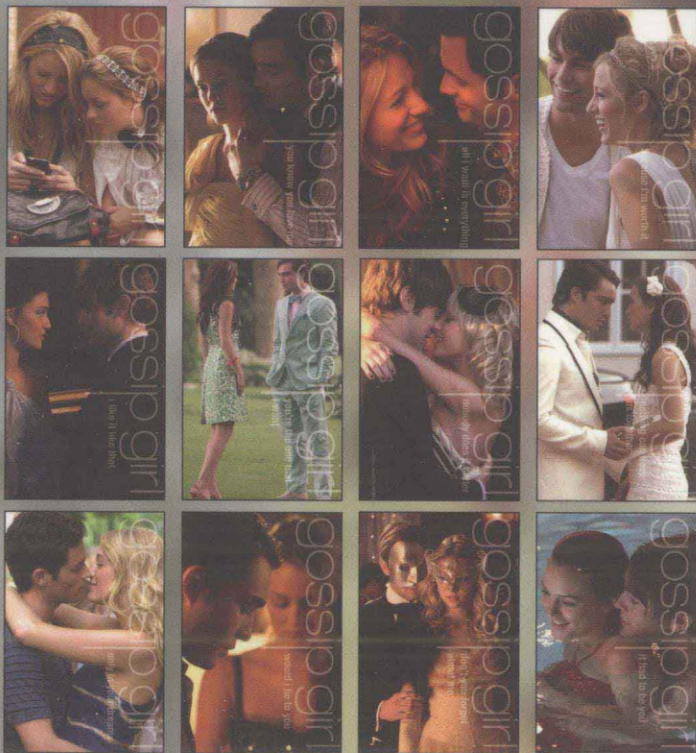


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a gossip girl  
novel

by  
Cecily von Ziegesar



**poppy**

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*And if love is, what thing and which is he? If love be good, from  
whennes cometh my woo?*

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*





*Disclaimer: All the real names of places, people, and events have been altered or abbreviated to protect the innocent. Namely, me.*

## hey people!

You know the saying, Today is the first day of the rest of your life? I always thought that sounded so lame and corny, but today it actually seems sort of profound. Plus, I'm beginning to think there's nothing wrong with corny. It's okay to tell the doorman to have a good day when he opens the door for you in the morning on the way to school. And why not stop to smell the lilacs planted outside the apartment buildings along Fifth Avenue? While you're at it, go ahead and stick a bunch behind your ear. It's still only April, but you now have permission to wear those new mint green leather Coach flip-flops—you know, the ones with the little yellow roses embroidered on them that you've been wearing around the house for over a month?—*outside*. Of course you'll probably get into trouble at school for being out of uniform, but how else are you going to show off your new Brazilian pedicure?

I know, I know. You probably think I'm crazy to sound so upbeat since this is the week we all find out whether or not we were accepted at the colleges we applied to. It's the most critical thing that's happened to us thus far. From now on we'll be branded by the school we choose, or rather, the school that chooses us: the smarty-pants who got into Yale, the lesbionic B-student volleyball player bound for Smith, the flaky heiress whose dad bought her into Brown. All I'm saying is, why not look on the bright side? The letters are in the mail, what's done is done, and I for one am eager to move on.

### **That stupid game we all used to play (and secretly still do)**

With college admissions almost behind us, now's the time to devote our full attention to something equally important: *our love lives*. It's

about time you and the boy of your dreams (please add the line "in bed" to each of the following):

Drank Fuzzy Navels and stayed up until dawn

Fed each other hot fudge sundaes

Watched old movies

Went skinny-dipping

Blew smoke rings

Played Twister

Gave each other temporary tattoos

Named your children

Cut gym

Tried Bikram yoga

Not that I'm advocating anything too illegal. Now is definitely not the time to screw up. You heard about that promising young actress who got into Harvard last year and then ran off to LA to hang out with her actor boyfriend for the month of May? Harvard acceptance . . . revoked!! The above list is simply the best way I know of to shed the pounds of stress that have been weighing us down. Talk about a diet I might actually stick to!

### **Your e-mail**

**Q:**

Dear Gossip Girl,

I just wanted to thank you for keeping my spirits up when I'm a total basket case. I don't know about you, but I applied to twelve schools and last night I dreamt I didn't get into one. Any advice on why I shouldn't run away to Mexico? Ur2cool.

—rose

**A:**

Dear rose,

Mexico sounds good, but twelve schools? Come on, you're bound to get into one, or even all twelve! And in case you feel like hurling yourself off a bridge before all twelve letters turn up,

stick close to your friends . . . unless you're worried they might actually push you! This is a sensitive time for all of us.

—GG

**Q:**

Dear GG,

So is that crazy drug rehab girl from Connecticut, like, gone from N's life? Because if he's single, I'm totally going to jump him.

—reddy

**A:**

Dear reddy,

Sorry, honey, but you'll have to wait in line—and no cutting, please! Unfortunately for us, someone got to him first. Actually, she's always been there and probably always will be. I think you know who I'm talking about. But don't be too jealous: her life is anything but perfect.

—GG

## Sightings

**N** waking and baking on the **Met** steps. I guess now that he's lax captain and is no longer hanging out with that fabulously insane drug rehab convict, he can relax and enjoy himself. **B** cutting assembly this morning to run home, on the off chance **Yale** was so eager to accept her they FedExed the letter for morning delivery. Talk about a basket case! **B** was also seen in **Barneys'** lingerie department trying on what can only be described as a "get lucky" ensemble. **S** biting her nails as she lay sunbathing in **Sheep Meadow** while scores of admiring boys looked on. What's she so worried about, anyway? **D** and **V** pretending not to notice each other as they waited on line to buy tickets to the new Ken Mogul film at the **Angelika**. **J** trying on a pair of wait-list-only python skin **Manolos** in **Bergdorf Goodman**. How exactly was she planning to pay for them, and where exactly is she planning to wear them? She may only be a freshman, but she's definitely ambitious.

**Just in case you want to relive these precious moments . . .**

**V** is making a documentary film about the whole getting-into-college thing. Think of it as an opportunity to vent and get four minutes in the



limelight. For the next two weeks, she'll be filming near Bethesda Fountain in Central Park after school.

My fingers and toes are all crossed. Good luck, everybody!

You know I mean it,

gossip girl

## ***b is the star of her own little movie***

“Just talk about how you’re feeling right now. You know, with college admission letters coming this week and everything.” Vanessa Abrams squinted into the camera and adjusted the lens so Blair’s jade-and-Swarovski-crystal chandelier earrings were in the frame. It was a balmy April afternoon and the park was a madhouse. Behind them a group of senior boys from St. Jude’s chased a Frisbee up the terraced steps overlooking Bethesda Fountain, swearing and tackling one another in a frenzy of pent-up pre-college-admission stress. Around the perimeter of the fountain lay sprawled the perfectly tanned and manicured bodies of Upper East Side high-school girls, smoking cigarettes and rubbing their legs with the latest Lancôme tan invigorator, while the winged bronze lady in the center of the fountain gazed down on them forgivingly.

Vanessa pressed record. “You can start anytime.”

Blair Waldorf licked her glossy lips and tucked the grown-out wisps of her dark brown pixie cut behind her ears. Underneath her plain black Polo shirt and gray Constance Billard uniform she was wearing the new turquoise-silk-and-black-lace underwire bra-and-thong set she’d bought in Barneys’ lingerie department. She pressed her back against

the fountain's rim and adjusted her butt on the folded-up bath towel Vanessa had given her to sit on.

Hot weather and thongs are a bad combination.

"I promised myself that if I got into Yale, Nate and I would finally do it," Blair began. She glanced down and twirled her ruby ring around and around on the ring finger of her left hand. "We're not even really together—*yet*. But we both know we want to be, and as soon as that letter comes . . ." She looked up at the camera, ignoring Vanessa's weirdly intense, shaven-headed, black-combat-boots-wearing stare. "For me it's not just about having sex, though. It's about my whole future. Yale and Nate. The two things I've always wanted."

She cocked her head. Actually, she wanted a lot of things. But except for that exquisite pair of Christian Louboutin silver lizard platform sandals, those were the two major ones.

"Nice try, loser!" a boy shouted as he snatched a Frisbee out of the air from under his friend's nose.

Blair closed her blue eyes and opened them again. "And if I *don't* get in . . ." She paused dramatically. "Someone is going to fucking pay."

Maybe she should be required to wear a muzzle this week.

Blair sighed, reached into her shirt, and adjusted her bra straps. "Some of my other friends—like Serena and Nate—aren't as freaked out about the whole college thing. But that's because they aren't living with their way-too-old-to-be-pregnant mom and their fat, gross stepfather. I mean, I don't even have my own room anymore!" She swiped a tear away and looked up at the camera with a mournful expression. "This is like my *one* chance to be happy. And I think I deserve it, you know?"

Cue applause.

## *n just wants to taste her lip gloss*

Reaching the end of the elm-tree-lined promenade leading up to the Bethesda Terrace and Fountain, Nate Archibald tossed the nub end of the joint he'd been smoking to the ground and walked straight past his Frisbee-playing friends. Not ten feet away, Blair sat cross-legged at the base of the fountain, talking into a camera. She looked nervous and sort of innocent. Her delicate hands fluttered around her small, foxlike face, and her short gray school uniform barely covered her muscular thighs. He shook the golden brown locks out of his emerald green eyes and shoved his hands into his khaki pants pockets. She was sexy all right.

Of course, at that very moment every single female in the park was thinking exactly the same thing—about *him*.

Nate recognized the odd, shaven-headed girl behind the camera only vaguely. Normally Blair would have nothing to do with her, but she was always up for anything that involved talking about herself. Blair liked attention, and even after breaking up with her and cheating on her for the umpteenth time, Nate still liked giving it to her. He dipped his hand into the fountain, walked up behind her, and flicked a few drops of water on her bare arm.

Blair whipped her head around to find Nate looking irresistible as ever in a pale yellow button-down, unbuttoned, untucked, and rolled up, so all she could see were his wonderful tanned muscles and perfect face. "You weren't listening to what I said, were you?" she demanded.

He shook his head and she got up from the towel, ignoring Vanessa completely. As far as Blair was concerned, they were finished.

"Hey." Nate ducked down and kissed her cheek. He smelled like smoke and clean laundry and new leather—all the good boy smells.

Yum.

"Hello." Blair tugged on her uniform. Why the hell hadn't she gotten into Yale *today*?

"I was just thinking about how last summer you were completely addicted to ice cream sandwiches," Nate observed. He had a sudden urge to lick all that candy-sweet-smelling lip gloss off her lips and run his tongue over her teeth.

She pretended to adjust her new earrings so he would notice them. "I'm too nervous to eat, but lemonade would taste really good right now."

Nate smiled and Blair tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, just as she always used to when they went around together. The old familiar thrill passed through her. It was always like this when they got back together—comfortable and thrilling at the same time. They walked over to the vendor parked at the top of the steps and Nate bought two cans of Country Time lemonade. Then they sat down on a nearby bench and he removed a silver flask from his olive green canvas Jack Spade backpack.

Cocktail hour!

Blair ignored the lemonade and grabbed the flask.

"I don't know why you're nervous," Nate assured her. "You're like the best student in your class." Nate felt sort of ambivalent about getting into college. He'd applied to five schools and yeah, he wanted to get into one of them, but he was pretty confident he'd have a decent time wherever he went.

Blair took another swig from the flask before giving it back. "In case you forgot, I kind of totally fucked up *both* of my interviews?" she reminded him.

Nate had heard about her little nervous breakdown at her first Yale interview and how she'd ended the session by kissing her interviewer. He'd also heard about her brief flirtation in a hotel room with her *alumni* interviewer. In a way, he was responsible for both mishaps. Whenever they broke up, Blair went completely apeshit.

He reached over and adjusted the ruby ring on her finger. "Relax. Everything's going to be okay," he told her soothingly. "I promise."

"Okay," Blair agreed, although the truth was she wasn't going to stop stressing until she had the Yale acceptance letter hanging above her bed in a custom-made silver Tiffany frame. She'd turn on the new Raves CD that always made her horny, even though it was kind of loud and obnoxious, and lie down on the bed, reading her acceptance letter over and over while Nate ravaged her naked body—

"Good." Nate leaned in and began to kiss her, interrupting her little X-rated fantasy.

Blair groaned inwardly. If only she could have sex with him right there on the greasy old wooden Central Park bench! But she had to wait until she heard from Yale. It was the deal she'd made with herself.



## *the only thing she hasn't got*

At the other end of the promenade Serena van der Woodsen was eating a Fudgsicle and minding her own business when she spotted her two best friends on a park bench, devouring each other's faces and looking like an advertisement for true love. Serena sighed, walking slowly as she licked fudgery drips from the popsicle stick. If only true love was something you *could* buy.

Not that she hadn't had a gazillion boyfriends who were totally crazy in love with her and totally fun. There was Perce, the French boy who'd chased her in a little orange convertible all over Europe. Then there was Guy, the English lord who'd wanted to elope with her to Barbados. Conrad, the boy up at boarding school in New Hampshire, who'd kept her up till dawn, smoking cigars. Dan Humphrey, the morbid poet who never could find the right metaphor for her. Flow, the rock star turned stalker—not that she really *minded* being stalked by someone that hot and famous. And Nate Archibald, the boy she'd lost her virginity to and would love forever, but only as a friend.

And that was just the shortlist.

Still, she had never had that one *true* love, the kind of love Blair and Nate had.

She tossed the remains of her ice cream into a trash can and quickened her pace, her pink terrycloth Mella flip-flops slapping noisily on the paved walkway, her long, pale blond hair streaming out behind her, and her short gray pleated Constance Billard uniform flouncing against her endlessly long legs. As she drew near, the boys cavorting around Bethesda Fountain and skateboarding up and down the promenade pressed their inner pause buttons and turned to gape. Serena, Serena, Serena—she was everything they'd ever wanted.

Not that they'd ever have the guts to even say hi to her.

"Why don't you guys just get a room at the Mandarin? It's only a few blocks away," Serena joked when she reached her friends on the bench.

Nate and Blair looked up with happy, dazed expressions on their faces.

"Did you do the thing?" Serena asked Blair in that way only best friends can understand.

"Uh-huh," Blair nodded. "I didn't talk for very long, though, because Nate was totally listening."

"Was not!" Nate protested.

Serena glanced at Nate. "I just wanted to make sure Blair wasn't freaking out too much. I should have known you'd be able to calm her down."

Blair took a sip of lemonade. "Did you hear anything yet?"

Serena swiped the lemonade away from her. "No, for the fiftieth time today, I didn't hear anything yet." She took a drink and then wiped her mouth on the sleeve of her pale pink Tocca blouse. "Did you?"

Blair shook her head. Then she had an idea. "Hey, why don't we keep all our letters and then open them together? You know, so we can, like, freak out at the same time?"

Serena took another swig of lemonade. It sounded like the

worst idea she'd ever heard, but she was willing to risk getting her eyes clawed out to make her friend happy. "Okay," she agreed reluctantly.

Nate didn't say anything. No way did he want to join *that* little party. He held out his flask to Serena. "You want?"

She wrinkled her perfect nose and wiggled her unpolished toes. "Nah. I'm late for my pedicure. See you guys." Then she turned and walked south toward the end of the park, taking the half-empty can of lemonade with her.

She had a habit of picking things up without even realizing she was doing it. Lemonade, boys . . .