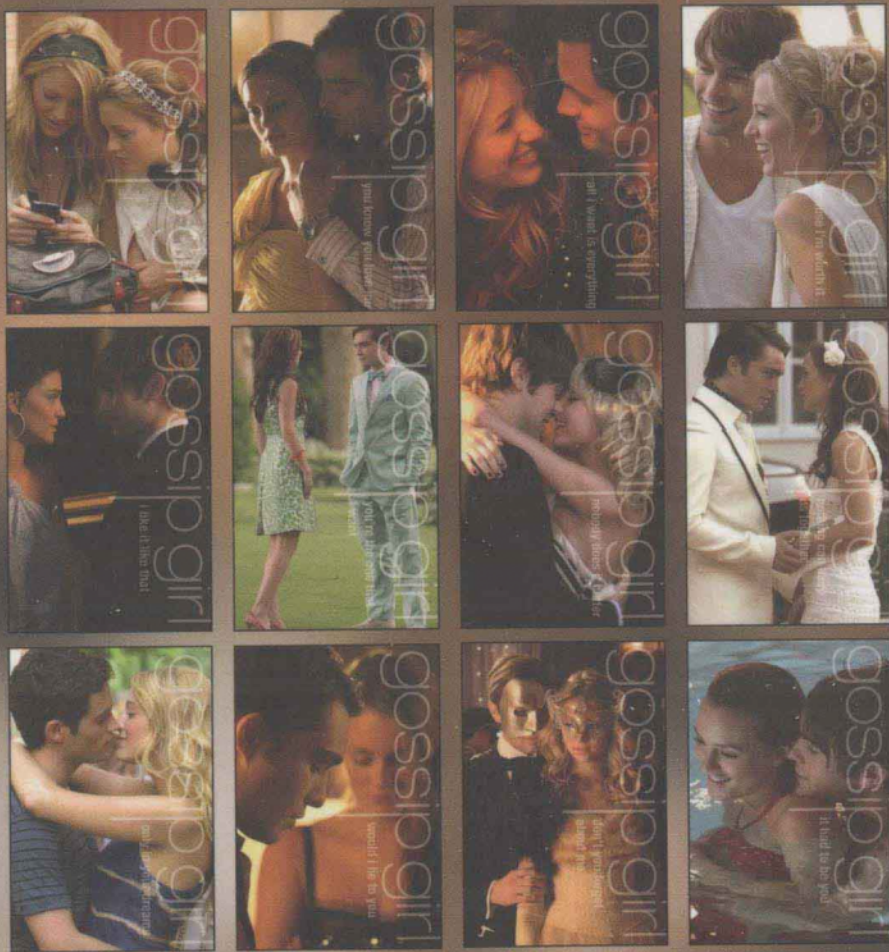




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gossip girl

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“Scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.”

—Oscar Wilde

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

hey people!

Ever wondered what the lives of the chosen ones are really like? Well, I'm going to tell you, because I'm one of them. I'm not talking about beautiful models or actors or musical prodigies or mathematical geniuses. I'm talking about the people who are *born to it*—those of us who have everything anyone could possibly wish for and who take it all completely for granted.

Welcome to New York City's Upper East Side, where my friends and I live and go to school and play and sleep—sometimes with each other. We all live in huge apartments with our own bedrooms and bathrooms and phone lines. We have unlimited access to money and booze and whatever else we want, and our parents are rarely home, so we have tons of privacy. We're smart, we've inherited classic good looks, we wear fantastic clothes, and we know how to party. Our shit still stinks, but you can't smell it because the bathroom is sprayed hourly by the maid with a refreshing scent made exclusively for us by French perfumers.

It's a luxe life, but someone's got to live it.

Our apartments are all within walking distance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue, and the single-sex private schools, like Constance Billard, which most of us go to. Even with a hangover, Fifth Avenue always looks so beautiful in the morning with the sunlight glimmering on the heads of the sexy St. Jude's School boys.

But something is rotten on museum mile. . . .

SIGHTINGS

B with her mother, arguing in a taxi in front of **Takashimaya**. **N** enjoying a joint on the steps of the **Met**. **C** buying new school shoes at **Barneys**. And a familiar, tall, eerily beautiful blond girl emerging from a New Haven line train in **Grand Central Station**. Approximate age, seventeen. Could it be? **S** is back?!

THE GIRL WHO LEAVES FOR BOARDING SCHOOL, GETS KICKED OUT, AND COMES BACK

Yes, **S** is back from boarding school. Her hair is longer, paler. Her blue eyes have that deep mysteriousness of kept secrets. She is wearing the same old fabulous clothes, now in rags from fending off New England storms. This morning **S**'s laughter echoed off the steps of the Met, where we will no longer be able to enjoy a quick smoke and a cappuccino without seeing her waving to us from her parents' apartment across the street. She has picked up the habit of biting her fingernails, which makes us wonder about her even more, and while we are all dying to ask her why she got kicked out of boarding school, we won't, because we'd really rather she had stayed away. But **S** is definitely here.

Just to be safe, we should all synchronize our watches. If we aren't careful, **S** is going to win over our teachers, wear that dress we couldn't fit into, eat the last olive, have sex in our parents' beds, spill Campari on our rugs, steal our brothers' and our boyfriends' hearts, and basically ruin our lives and piss us all off in a major way.

I'll be watching closely. I'll be watching all of us. It's going to be a wild and wicked year. I can smell it.

Love,

gossip girl

like most juicy stories, it started at a party

“I watched Nickelodeon all morning in my room so I wouldn’t have to eat breakfast with them,” Blair Waldorf told her two best friends and Constance Billard School classmates, Kati Farkas and Isabel Coates. “My mother cooked him an omelet. I didn’t even know she knew how to use the stove.”

Blair tucked her long, dark brown hair behind her ears and swigged her mother’s fine vintage scotch from the crystal tumbler in her hand. She was already on her second glass.

“What shows did you watch?” Isabel asked, removing a stray strand of hair from Blair’s black cashmere cardigan.

“Who cares?” Blair said, stamping her foot. She was wearing her new black ballet flats. Very bow-tie proper preppy, which she could get away with because she could change her mind in an instant and put on her trashy, pointed, knee-high boots and that sexy metallic skirt her mother hated. Poof—rock star sex kitten. Meow.

“The point is, I was trapped in my room all morning because they were busy having a gross romantic breakfast in their matching red silk bathrobes. They didn’t even take *showers*.” Blair took another gulp of her drink. The only way to tolerate the thought of her mother sleeping with *that man* was to get drunk—very drunk.

Luckily Blair and her friends came from the kind of families for whom drinking was as commonplace as blowing your nose. Their parents believed in the quasi-European idea that the more access kids have to alcohol, the less likely they are to abuse it. So Blair and her friends could drink whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, as long as they maintained their grades and their looks and didn't embarrass themselves or the family by puking in public, peeing their pants, or ranting in the streets. The same thing went for everything else, like sex or drugs—as long as you kept up appearances, you were all right.

But keep your panties on. That's coming later.

The man Blair was so upset about was Cyrus Rose, her mother's new boyfriend. At that very moment Cyrus Rose was standing on the other side of the living room, greeting the dinner guests. He looked like someone who might help you pick out shoes at Saks—bald, except for a small, bushy mustache, his fat stomach barely hidden in a shiny blue double-breasted suit. He jingled the change in his pocket incessantly, and when he took his jacket off, there were big, nasty sweat marks on his underarms. He had a loud laugh and was very sweet to Blair's mother. But he wasn't Blair's father. Last year Blair's father ran off to France with another man.

No kidding. They live in a chateau and run a vineyard together. Which is actually pretty cool if you think about it.

Of course none of that was Cyrus Rose's fault, but that didn't matter to Blair. As far as Blair was concerned, Cyrus Rose was a completely annoying, fat, *loser*.

But tonight Blair was going to have to tolerate Cyrus Rose, because the dinner party her mother was giving was in his honor, and all the Waldorfs' family friends were there to meet him: the Bass family and their sons Chuck and Donald; Mr. Farkas and his daughter, Kati; the well-known actor Arthur

Coates, his wife Titi, and their daughters, Isabel, Regina, and Camilla; Captain and Mrs. Archibald and their son Nate. The only ones still missing were Mr. and Mrs. van der Woodsen whose teenage daughter, Serena, and son, Erik, were both away at school.

Blair's mother was famous for her dinner parties, and this was her first since her infamous divorce. The Waldorf penthouse had been expensively redecorated that summer in deep reds and chocolate browns, and it was full of antiques and artwork that would have impressed anyone who knew anything about art. In the center of the dining room table was an enormous silver bowl full of white orchids, pussy willows, and chestnut tree branches—a modern ensemble from Takashimaya, the Fifth Avenue luxury goods store. Gold-leafed place cards lay on every porcelain plate. In the kitchen, Myrtle the cook was singing Bob Marley songs to the soufflé, and the sloppy Irish maid, Esther, hadn't poured scotch down anyone's dress yet, thank God.

Blair was the one getting sloppy. And if Cyrus Rose didn't stop harassing Nate, her boyfriend, she was going to have to go over there and spill her scotch all over his tacky Italian loafers.

"You and Blair have been going out a long time, am I right?" Cyrus said, punching Nate in the arm. He was trying to get the kid to loosen up a little. All these Upper East Side kids were way too uptight.

That's what he thinks. Give them time.

"You sleep with her yet?" Cyrus asked.

Nate turned redder than the upholstery on the eighteenth-century French chaise next to him. "Well, we've known each other practically since we were born," he stuttered. "But we've only been going out for like, a year. We don't want to ruin it by, you know, rushing, before we're ready?" Nate was just spitting back the line that Blair always gave him when he asked her if

she was ready to do it or not. But he was talking to his girlfriend's mother's boyfriend. What was he supposed to say, "Dude, if I had my way we'd be doing it right *now*"?

"Absolutely," Cyrus Rose said. He clasped Nate's shoulder with a fleshy hand. Around his wrist was one of those gold Cartier cuff bracelets that you screw on and never take off—very popular in the 1980s and not so popular now, unless you've actually bought into that whole '80s revival thing. *Hello?*

"Let me give you some advice," Cyrus told Nate, as if Nate had a choice. "Don't listen to a word that girl says. Girls like surprises. They want you to keep things interesting. You know what I mean?"

Nate nodded, frowning. He tried to remember the last time he'd surprised Blair. The only thing that came to mind was the time he'd brought her an ice cream cone when he picked her up at her tennis lesson. That was over a month ago, and it was a pretty lame surprise by any standard. At this rate, he and Blair might never have sex.

Nate was one of those boys you look at and while you're looking at them, you know they're thinking, *that girl can't take her eyes off me because I'm so hot*. Although he didn't act at all conceited about it. He couldn't help looking hot, he was just born that way. Poor guy.

That night Nate was wearing the moss-green cashmere V-neck sweater Blair had given him last Easter, when her father had taken them skiing in Sun Valley for a week. Secretly, Blair had sewn a tiny gold heart pendant onto the inside of one of the sweater's sleeves, so that Nate would always be wearing her heart on his sleeve. Blair liked to think of herself as a hopeless romantic in the style of old movie actresses like Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe. She was always coming up with plot

devices for the movie she was starring in at the moment, the movie that was her life.

"I love you," Blair had told Nate breathily when she gave him the sweater.

"Me too," Nate had said back, although he wasn't exactly sure if it was true or not.

When he put the sweater on, it looked so good on him that Blair wanted to scream and rip all her clothes off. But it seemed unattractive to scream in the heat of the moment—more femme fatale than girl-who-gets-boy—so Blair kept quiet, trying to remain fragile and baby-birdlike in Nate's arms. They kissed for a long time, their cheeks hot and cold at the same time from being out on the slopes all day. Nate twined his fingers in Blair's hair and pulled her down on the hotel bed. Blair put her arms above her head and let Nate begin to undress her, until she realized where this was all heading, and that it wasn't a movie after all, it was *real*. So, like a good girl, she sat up and made Nate stop.

She'd kept on making him stop right on up until today. Only two nights ago, Nate had come over after a party with a half-drunk flask of brandy in his pocket and had lain down on her bed and murmured, "I want you, Blair." Once again, Blair had wanted to scream and jump on top of him, but she resisted. Nate fell asleep, snoring softly, and Blair lay down next to him and imagined that she and Nate were starring in a movie in which they were married and he had a drinking problem, but she would stand by him always and love him forever, even if he occasionally wet the bed.

Blair wasn't trying to be a tease, she just wasn't *ready*. She and Nate had barely seen each other at all over the summer because she had gone to that horrible boot camp of a tennis school in North Carolina, and Nate had gone sailing with his

father off the coast of Maine. Blair wanted to make sure that after spending the whole summer apart they still loved each other as much as ever. She had wanted to wait to have sex until her seventeenth birthday next month.

But now she was through with waiting.

Nate was looking better than ever. The moss-green sweater had turned his eyes a dark, sparkling green, and his wavy brown hair was streaked with golden blond from his summer on the ocean. And, just like that, Blair knew she was ready. She took another sip of her scotch. *Oh, yes.* She was definitely ready.