

I will always love you
a **gossip girl** novel

Created by
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poppy

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Love is like war: easy to begin but very hard to stop.

—H. L. Mencken

hey people!

ho, ho, ho!

'Tis the season to be jolly. Fa la la la la, la la la la. Don we now our gay apparel . . . which just so happens to have been made for us by the little elves at Givenchy or YSL or Oscar de la Renta. Who are *we*, you ask? The residents of Manhattan's Golden Mile, of course—that glorious stretch of doorman buildings above Fifty-ninth Street and below Eighty-sixth. It's Christmastime, time to deck our sprawling Upper East Side penthouses with silver and gold baubles, twinkly lights, velvet bows, and chocolates imported from belle Paris. Here the holidays are always a little more sparkly, a little brighter, a little *better*. It's so, so good to be back.

While I'm not about to tell you where I've been for the past few months, I will tell you that there *is* life after high school. Yes, it finally happened: We went to college. During the past semester we encountered people who haven't seen us naked (yet), and who don't know our SAT scores; who don't remember that time we wet our pants in kindergarten, or when we got our ears pierced. We've learned a few new things, made a few new friends, and have even maybe met the loves our lives. We've changed—hopefully for the better. And we're just as fabulous as always.

Take **B**, for instance. She's spending a perfect holiday with her perfect

Yale boyfriend and his perfect family at their idyllic Vermont compound. That girl always had her eye on the prize. Speaking of prizes, what's **S** up to these days? No longer hounded by overeager, fashion-conscious Constance Billard girls, she's now trailed by the paparazzi and a posse of wannabe movie starlets while she cools her Louboutins, waiting for her nomination for the SAG Awards. No matter where she is or what she does, **S** will always be one to watch.

Then there are those who've tried their darnedest to change: **N** has been sailing around the world for the last four months. But as we learned from Kant in our freshman seminars, no man is an island. He'll be back—sooner rather than later, we hope. Then there's **D**, scratching out existential poetry in his black Moleskine notebook in the Pacific Northwest. It may look like a total lifestyle change, but he still insists on Folgers crystals instead of French press in the coffee capital of the U.S. He also spends every waking moment Skyping his shaven-headed, ultra-independent filmmaker girlfriend, **V**, who's at NYU and seems to almost have . . . *hair*. And friends?! And finally there's **C**, last seen with a pack of flannel-wearing, log-lifting, very rugged boys out in Nevada or Montana or someplace with no cities and lots of cattle. Is he into a new type, or has he gone through yet another reinvention? That man puts Madonna to shame.

Mistletoe and New Year's Eve are all about kissing, and something tells me there's going to be lots and lots of kissing this break. Lucky for you, I'll be here to report *everything* worth reporting after the holiday lights are unplugged and the pretty velvet ribbons have been untied. Let the reunion begin!

your e-mail

g: Dear Gossip Girl,
I'm visiting my great aunt in New York City for the holidays, and I heard that Serena van der Woodsen lives here and you know everything about her. Are you her? Oh my God, if you're her, can you please send me an autograph? Or maybe hang out?
—lheartSvW

a: Dear lheart,
While I prefer to live my life outside the spotlight, according to my sources, your heroine's out almost every night. You should be able to find her if you know where to look.
—GG

g: Dear Gossip Girl,
My college dining hall only serves, like, deep-fried cheese balls and I may have gained some weight. Should I celebrate NYE with my high school friends, or pretend I have the flu?
—HittingtheBuffet

a: Dear HtheB,
While I'm not a dietician or a therapist, I can definitely say you're not alone. My advice: How you look is all about how you pull it off. Go out, wear your little black dress, and show off those curves. No one will even notice those tater tot pounds.
—GG

sightings

B on a train from **New Haven** to **Montpelier, Vermont**, looking very out of place in a sea of multicolored plaid flannel. **S** with three interchangeable anorexic dyed blond girls on the red carpet for a premiere. **V** and

some friends from **NYU**, including a very hot hipster teaching assistant, at a film party in **Bushwick**. Is someone trying to get extra credit? **D** and his little sister, **J**, splitting a plate of gooey chocolate-chip pancakes at one of those horribly crowded diners on upper Broadway. **C** and his new horde of cowboy boot-clad dudes ordering Cokes at the lounge at **Tribeca Star**. Should the hotel erect a hitching post?

still breaking all the rules

Technically you no longer live under your parents' roof. You've already indulged them with Scrabble and decorating gingerbread men that no one's going to eat. Now it's time to party. You can always reform after January 1st—that's what New Year's resolutions are for. So go out, have fun, and show your former besties and former flames just how much *better* you've become.

Besides, now that you know I'm watching, aren't you just dying to put on a show? Thought so.

You know you love me,

gossip girl

all b wants for christmas

“You awake, Scout?”

Blair Waldorf awoke from a nap to the sight of her boyfriend, Pete Carlson, gazing down at her. Pete smiled his adorable, lop-sided smile. His eyes were ocean blue and framed by strawberry blond lashes, to match his thick, floppy head of hair.

Blair threw the Black Watch-plaid duvet to the foot of the couch and discreetly checked for drool with her index finger. She *loved* being woken up by Pete, especially when he called her by an adorable nickname. Currently, it was Scout, because she'd directed him and his three older brothers to the best Douglas fir Christmas tree, deep in the woods of the Carlsons' expansive Woodstock, Vermont, estate. Early this morning, they'd all opened presents underneath the magnificent tree. Pete had given Blair a pair of navy blue-and-tan North Face hiking boots with the promise that he'd bring her on some of his favorite trails when it got warmer. Blair had never been one for the great wide open, but Pete loved being outdoors, and suddenly the idea of sleeping under the stars with him at her side seemed almost romantic.

“Of course I’m awake,” Blair lied, sitting up and yawning. It was only noon, but Pete’s adorable-but-hyper nieces and nephews had woken everyone up to open presents at the ungodly hour of 5 a.m.

“Good.” Pete settled next to her on the worn navy blue couch, tenderly pushing Blair’s long bangs off her foxlike face. Her hair was a little shaggier than she liked, but she simply didn’t trust any of the hair salons in dingy New Haven. Besides, what were unkempt bangs when she was with a guy who truly loved her?

“Have any dreams? You were making these little growls in your sleep. It was cute.” Pete pulled the woolen blanket off the floor and draped it over their legs.

“Oh.” Blair frowned. She was *growling*?

In truth, she’d been having a lot of weird dreams lately. Last night, she’d woken up and thought she was at a sleepover at her old best friend Serena van der Woodsen’s house, only to find herself all alone in the dark, regal guest bedroom of the Carlsons’ oversize colonial.

Maybe it was just homesickness. After all, she didn’t have a home in New York anymore, she hadn’t seen Serena since *August*, and no one in her family was even in the U.S. this week. Her father, Harold, was celebrating Christmas in Provence with his boyfriend, Giles, and their adopted twins. Her stepbrother, Aaron, was on a kibbutz in Israel. Her mother, stepfather, brother, Tyler, and baby sister, Yale, had moved to LA back in August, to a gigantic, tacky Pacific Palisades mansion that they were making even bigger and tackier. While the renovations were taking place, the four were traveling in the South Pacific, visiting the islands that Eleanor Rose, in a fit of pregnancy-induced mania last spring, had bought for each member of the family. Blair had been some-

what tempted to tag along, if only to see her baby sister, the least fucked-up member of her tragically absurd family.

That was all before she'd received the holiday card her mother had sent out. CELEBRATE THE WALDORF-ROSE FAMILY'S HOLIDAY MERGER had been written in gold script atop a photograph of her bald stepfather. Cyrus Rose was dressed in a bright red velvet Santa suit, holding an elf-costumed infant Yale in one hand, a menorah in the other. Celebrating the holiday *merger* suddenly seemed a whole lot less appealing. And once she'd been invited to spend Christmas with the picture-perfect Carlsons, she felt it was her duty as a girlfriend to go.

"I was just dreaming about you. Us. I'm just so happy." Blair sighed contentedly as she gazed into the blaze roaring in the quaint brick fireplace across the room. Outside, a thin blanket of snow covered the ground.

"Me too." Pete ruffled her hair and pulled her face into his for a kiss.

"You taste nice," Blair breathed, letting her body relax into Pete's muscular arms. She shrugged off her black Loro Piana cashmere cardigan so she was wearing only her peach Cosabella tank top.

It was funny how things worked out. When she arrived at Yale four months ago, Blair discovered that her incessantly perky roommate, Alana Hoffman, sang a cappella. *All* the time. Blair would wake up to Alana singing "Son of a Preacher Man" to her collection of Gund teddy bears. Avoiding her room, Blair spent a lot of time in the library, where Pete was writing a paper for his magical realism class. Blair hadn't been able to so much as *look* at a guy ever since Nate Archibald, her high school boyfriend and the supposed love of her life, chose not to come to Yale with

her, leaving her high and dry at Grand Central Station to head to college alone. But that day, spotting Pete's adorably rugged stubble, the half-smile he always wore, and the intense concentration in his dark blue eyes as he bent over his worn paperback book, Blair felt for the first time that there could be life after Nate. She and Pete had exchanged flirty glances, and finally he invited her for coffee.

They'd been inseparable ever since. In fact, since Thanksgiving, Blair had been practically living with Pete—and his five gin-swilling, athletic roommates—in a comfortably shabby Chapel Street town house. At first, Blair had been nervous about living with so many guys, but she sort of liked having instantaneous brothers, and most of the time being the only girl in the room. Especially when they gave her free rein of the upstairs bathroom and didn't mind helping her with stats homework.

It was amazing how *easy* everything could be with Pete. For the first time in Blair's eighteen years, her life made sense. She loved her pre-law classes, lived in a house of boys who adored her, had a loving, handsome boyfriend, and had even found a surrogate family in the Carlsons.

One that didn't use the word *merger*.

For the past few days, they'd spent every waking hour with the family: Pete's former U.S. senator dad, Chappy; his Boston debutante mom, Jane; his three older brothers, their wives, and assorted cherubic nephews and nieces whom Blair couldn't even try to keep straight. It sounded like a nightmare, but it was actually heavenly. Mr. Carlson was barrel-chested and red-faced and told corny jokes in a way that made everyone crack up, and his mom would randomly recite Anne Sexton poetry at the dinner table without being drunk. The brothers were good-looking, friendly,

and smart, their wives were polished and welcoming, and even the kids were polite. So far, it had been a perfect holiday.

And it was about to get even better. To celebrate the New Year, Chappy had booked the entire family at an exclusive five-star resort in Costa Rica. Obviously, Blair could do without the rain forest adventure part, but she'd heard the beaches were pristine, the sun was hot, and the villas had the most incredible mattresses.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. "You kids decent?" Pete's older brother Jason called as he entered. He had the same lanky frame as Pete. Tall, strawberry blond, and handsome, all four of the Carlson brothers—Everett, Randy, Jason, and Pete—looked like they could be quadruplets, even though there was a two-year age difference between each of them. A second-year law student at UPenn, Jason was the second youngest of the Carlson brothers. He was adorable, and Blair would've had a crush on him if she wasn't dating Pete.

At least she has a backup.

"We're playing charades. Carlson Christmas tradition. Your presence has been requested."

"Do we have to?" Blair suppressed a groan. It was cute in theory, but they'd played charades, Pictionary, and Scrabble the last three days. Blair was extremely competitive, and it was exhausting simultaneously trying to win and to not appear like all she cared about was winning.

Maybe they should shake it up with some Truth or Dare.

"And guess who's requested you on his team again?" Jason smirked, flashing Blair the trademark white-toothed Carlson smile. "Our dad loves you!"

"Yay!" Blair replied encouragingly, mustering her enthusiasm. She followed Pete through the wide arching hallway that led

to the kitchen. The whole house was a contradiction: The walls were rough wood, but the polished wood floors were covered in antique Turkish carpets. In the kitchen, a large wood stove hunkered in the corner opposite two massive Sub-Zero refrigerators. Several overstuffed yellow chairs sat in front of a large dormer window, each one containing a different member of the family. Chappy, in a cream-colored cable-knit Aran Islands sweater, stood in front of the whole group, calling them to order.

“Scout!” he called gleefully as he spotted Blair and Pete.

“Hi, Mr. Carlson.” Blair smiled warmly as Chappy clapped her on the shoulder.

“I already claimed you, so back off, boys,” he announced jovially to Pete’s brothers, who all smiled politely back at her, even though Everett didn’t bother to look up from his iPhone. “I’m telling you, Scout, I don’t know how I’m going to manage without you next week,” Chappy continued.

“Oh, well, I’m sure we can play on the beach or something,” Blair said. She blushed. The phrase sounded totally inappropriate when she said it out loud. “Play charades on the beach,” she clarified quickly.

“Yeah, but what’ll I do without my favorite teammate?” Chappy shook his head sorrowfully. “No offense, Jane, but you cheat.”

“I do cheat, I’ll be the first to admit it.” Jane Carlson had wheat blond hair cut in a sensible bob and was tall, with an athletic frame. She was wearing the same style sweater as her husband. “I’m glad you’re on the straight and narrow.” She winked at Blair.

But Blair was still stuck on the part of Chappy’s sentence that implied she *wouldn’t* be in Costa Rica with them. She’d bought five new Eres bikinis for the occasion. They made the most of the

five pounds she'd gained from the gross food she'd been forced to eat on Yale's meal plan. "*Without me?*" Blair blurted stupidly.

"I mean, I'd bring you along, but we've got a saying in the Carlson family . . ." Chappy began, his blue eyes shining, as if he were about to deliver a stump speech. "I believe, when it comes to vacations, in the 'no ring, no bring' rule."

"It's the Carlson curse." Jason sighed, elbowing Blair in the ribs sympathetically. She stepped away. While it was true Blair had never *officially* been invited to Costa Rica, she'd been invited for Christmas, for God's sake. Wasn't that even more exclusive than a beach holiday? And why *not* invite her? After all, she'd brought Nate on her family vacations for years and it wasn't like she'd been married to him.

Except in her dreams.

"Blair, we love you and we want you in our family for years to come, but I need to be a stickler on this," Chappy explained sympathetically, as if she were one of his constituents, arguing over some impossibly arcane rule. "I've raised four boys, and while they've behaved around you, honestly, these gentlemen cause more theatrics when it comes to ladies than the Yale School of Drama," he finished, shaking his head.

"Maybe you could get together with your girlfriends and have a girls' adventure!" Pete's sister-in-law Sarah piped up from the corner of the room, stroking her Lilly Pulitzer-patterned eight-months-pregnant belly. "I remember when I heard the Carlson rule, I had a great time with the Theta girls. We went to Cancún!" A look of happy reminiscence crossed Sarah's lightly tanned, heart-shaped face.

"You did?" Randy asked, shooting a look at Sarah. "I didn't know that."

“Sorry, son!” Chappy clapped Pete on the back. “Sorry, Scout!”

Blair narrowed her eyes at a painting that hung over the fireplace, of a ship in what looked like an exceptionally violent storm. What a boring, random piece of art to hang in a house. Suddenly she hated her stupid nickname. *Scout?*

Out would have been more appropriate.

“Blair, I’m sorry,” Pete said simply. “I thought you understood. . . .”

“What? I knew I wasn’t coming,” Blair lied, smiling fakely. Her stomach was churning wildly. For a brief second, she wanted to excuse herself, run to the second-floor bathroom, and puke everything she’d eaten for the past five days.

“Blair, darling, here’s your hot chocolate. I made sure to put some extra marshmallows in there.” Jane pushed the steaming ceramic mug into Blair’s hands. “Won’t you sit down?” She gestured to one of the comfortable overstuffed forest green chairs.

“Thanks.” Blair nodded. She squared her shoulders and turned to the waiting Carlson clan. No way was she going to let the Brady Bunch see her sweat. “You all ready to play?” She forced herself to smile, a plan already forming.

“Maybe I *will* have a wild girls’ weekend,” she whispered in Pete’s ear. “I haven’t been to New York all year, except those two weekends with you, and those don’t count, since we never even left the hotel.” His face fell as he no doubt pictured all the raucous fun she’d be having without him. Blair raised an eyebrow challengingly. After all, she was a woman. A Yale woman. She had places to go.

And more important games to play.

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