

nothing can keep us together  
a gossip girl  
novel

by  
Cecily von Ziegesar



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

New York → Boston

*When caught between two evils, I generally like to take the one  
I never tried.*

—Mae West



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

## hey people!

June is right around the corner and New York City is like a burning Diptyque candle: hot and smelly, beautiful and bright. It's getting dark so late now, we can't tell the difference between night and day. Not that we care. At this time of year our turf—also known as the Upper East Side—is virtually parent-free. They're far too busy with polo matches and garden parties, tennis matches and golf games up at our country houses in Ridgefield, Connecticut; Bridgehampton, Long Island; Newport, Rhode Island; or Mt. Desert Isle, Maine, leaving us to rule the town. Not that we ever *stopped* ruling the town. Our names have been at the top of the guest list at every exclusive restaurant, club, and hotel in Manhattan since the day we were born. We move in clusters, dominating the scene uptown and downtown, east and west. The entire island is and always has been *ours*, but with June comes graduation, and for us seniors that means saying good-bye. But let's not get all sappy and dreary. Now's the time to really make our mark. If we get what we want for graduation, pretty soon we'll all have *cars*. It's our turn to be louder and more obnoxious and more beautiful than ever—honk, honk!! And with no one around to disapprove (as if we care), it's time to seriously misbehave.

Five reasons to party harder than we ever have in our lives:

- 1) Studying for finals is deathly boring.
- 2) It's almost summer!

3) We deserve it!!

4) The AC is cranked so high, we have to find *some* way to keep warm—nudge, nudge.

5) It's our last chance. Most of us will be going away for the summer, and after that, it's off to college. *This is it.*

Before you get too crazy and do something you might regret, you'll need to decide whether you and your boyfriend are devoted enough to have a long-distance relationship throughout the summer and on into college. Imagine yourself surrounded by tan hunks in Billabong surf shorts, with sandy bare feet, offering you rides in their vintage Cabriolets. Imagine hot campus preppers in only their cute mint-green-and-white polka-dotted J.Crew boxers, on their way to the showers in your coed dorm. Will you honestly be able to resist? Why not save yourself the pain of a torturous, drawn-out breakup by breaking up now? Then treat yourself to a meaningless fling with that shy, adorable geek you went to ballroom dancing school with in fifth grade who's not such a geek anymore. You've got absolutely nothing to lose. And while you're at it, why not at least *pretend* to be nice to the stringy-haired, bucktoothed girl you forgot to invite to your birthday party in seventh grade and every birthday party you've had since. That way she can point to your picture in the yearbook and brag to all her new pals at Mt. Hollyhock or whatever dorky college she's going to next year, "See this cool chick here? She was one of my best friends!" But never mind trying to rekindle old romances and repair messed-up friendships.

I don't know about you, but I've got a major fashion crisis on my hands. Most of the private girls' schools take their graduation ceremonies extremely seriously. The girls must wear long white dresses, white gloves, and white shoes. It's like a wedding, except we're being set free instead of tied down—yippee! Still, the question looms: to Oscar or not to Oscar. Oscar de la Renta, that is. If you go for Oscar, you're likely to wind up wearing the same dress as six of your other classmates, although you know

you're going to look far better in him than they do. And the nice thing about having to stick to white is that you can always dye it and wear it again. Yeah, right—like you're ever going to *want* to wear that dress again!

While I've got your attention, let's check in on a few of our favorite people. . . .

### **The odd couple**

There has been some speculation that the relationship between those two totally opposite Williamsburg apartment sharers is not just a simple, convenient roommate situation but something more—how shall we put it?—*romantic*. **B** does seem to be wearing a lot of black lately, and her shoes are getting chunkier. And what was with that silver Tiffany *barrette* in **V**'s supershort hair the other day? Can't you just picture them, cuddling on the sofa, combing each other's hair, trading Manolos and Doc Martens? . . . Who needs boys?!

### **Speaking of boys**

**B** may have given them up entirely—who wouldn't, after **N**'s latest stunt?—but **V** seems to be enjoying the company of the opposite sex more and more. She and **B**'s shaven-headed vegan stepbrother, **A**, have been romping unfettered and partially clothed in coffee shops and on park benches all over Williamsburg. Nothing like a little PDA to light **V**'s fire!

As for **N**, you'd think he'd be on top of the world after scoring the city's most desirable blond bombshell—right in front of **B**, in the pool house bathtub during the girls' senior cut day party out in Southampton, no less. But no. Have you seen him lately? Red-rimmed eyes, dirty tissues streaming from his pockets, lackluster disposition. Our golden boy appears to be in a terrible funk. Or maybe he caught a sexually transmitted disease from one of those French tramps he's always rumored to be hooking up with. See? It doesn't pay to be too greedy. Not that that ever stopped us.

## Your e-mail

**Q:**

Dear GG,  
I'm going to Vassar next year and I've been in love with this boy since I was like three, and I just found out he's going to Vassar too! I'm so excited, but I'm worried I'm going to spend so much time trying to get him to talk to me, I won't even realize I'm at college, you know?  
—lvstrk

**A:**

Dear lvstrk,  
Forgive me for being blunt, but I have a feeling you've already spent a lot of time trying to get this guy to talk to you. Wait till you get to Vassar—there's going to be a whole new group of adorable boys you've never seen before, and some of them might be even more lovable. And since most dorms are coed these days, you can't *avoid* talking to them!  
—GG

## Sightings

**B** and **V** buying potted basil plants at a **Williamsburg** farmer's market. Maybe the gay rumors about them are true!? **C** entering a **Greenwich Village** barbershop to have his head shaved and exiting with his hair longer than before and with platinum highlights. No way will he last even a month at military school. **N** standing on the roof of the Met, mournfully surveying **Central Park**. Looks like our favorite stoner playboy has been struck with a bad case of ennui. **D** checking out bashed-up Buicks at some seedy used car lot in **Harlem**. Not that he even knows how to operate a gearshift. **J** taking a solo SSAT—the boarding school admissions exam—on a Saturday in the headmistress's office at Constance Billard. She's determined to go, and her school is even more determined to get rid of her!

### **All you have to do is pass**

My advice: Don't miss a Zac Posen sample sale or a Stella McCartney trunk show for one of those silly everything-we-ever-learned pre-final exam cram sessions the teachers "recommend" you attend after school. Do pour yourself a goblet of well-chilled pinot grigio and casually read through your notebooks. All you have to do is pass, and believe me, you're a lot smarter than you think. Good luck, my darlings. Can't wait to see you at graduation!

You know you love me.

gossip girl

## *where the girls all go*

“Are you going to try that on?” a weirdly underdeveloped senior named Alison Baker asked Blair Waldorf timidly. Blair pushed the silver hanger down the rail toward Alison. A white, cardboard-stiff linen tunic by some random Scandinavian designer? *No, thanks.*

“Take it,” she responded generously.

Alison had thin, waist-length brown hair, a gap between her front teeth, and was bone thin. She wore a white button-down oxford shirt every day and the type of navy blue lace-up shoes that Constance Billard required in kindergarten but which were phased out of the uniform in first grade. Once, in fourth grade, Alison had peed in her pants in the library because she wouldn’t go to the bathroom before finishing *Anne of Green Gables*, and she’d had to spend the rest of the day wearing a pair of too-small mustard yellow cable-knit Hanna Andersson wool tights from the lost and found with no underwear.

*Scratch, scratch.*

In sixth grade, Alison had unsuccessfully invited Blair to her country house in Osterville on Cape Cod two weekends in a row before finally giving up. She’d then proceeded to spread a nasty rumor that Blair’s father wouldn’t let her go away on weekends because he and Blair were having an

incestuous relationship and that was the only time they had together.

Blair's totally *gay* dad? Hello, stupidity?

"That dress would look fantastic on you. My shoulders are way too narrow for it," Blair lied.

Alison pulled the tunic dress on over her oxford shirt and let her Constance Billard uniform fall to the floor. The dress hung from her stick-figure body like a soggy potato sack. With her mousy brown hair in a limp middle part, she looked like the girl who gets possessed by a demon in that sick horror film *The Exorcist*. "Do you think it's too big?" she asked Blair.

Even Blair didn't have the heart to pretend that Alison actually looked good. "Maybe," she replied, too preoccupied with the pile of brightly colored, slinky silk jersey Diane von Furstenberg cami-dresses to care anymore.

"Hey, I was about to try that one on!" Isabel Coates whipped a frothy white Stella McCartney frock out of Rain Hoffstetter's hands and held it up to her ladder-tall, waistless frame. She was growing out her bangs and her sleek, dark hair was bobby-pinned down to her forehead in seven different places in a sort of intentional disarray that looked semi-cool and semiretarded.

"Hello? That's a size two. No *way* are you a size two," Rain countered, gripping the hem of the dress and threatening to rip it out of Isabel's hands. "I'm shorter than you," she insisted determinedly, even though, like Isabel, Rain was a lot closer to a size six than a size two.

"I don't know why you guys are being such bitches about that stupid dress," Blair yawned over at them as she moved on to a rack of beaded lilac-and-pink Sea Island cotton Nicole Farhi sweetheart sweaters. "It's *off-white*, and look." She pointed a pearly manicured finger at the white satin padded hanger the frock hung from. "The belt that goes with it is *pink*. Our graduation dresses have to be totally *white*."

Even though it was two sizes too small, Isabel still clung to the dress as if her life depended on it. “Well, maybe I don’t want it for graduation. Maybe I have a party to go to or something.”

As if she got invited to secret parties that Blair didn’t know about.

Today was opening day for the Browns of London trunk show in the main ballroom at the St. Clair Hotel, and this particular group of Constance Billard senior girls had all cut homeroom to be there. What better way to find the dress that had been sampled in England but never sold in New York—the perfect, coveted, one-of-a-kind graduation dress. The only problem was that their graduation dresses had to be all white, and most designers shy away from all-white dresses so as not to invoke unsexy images of baby christenings and Little Bo Peep.

Not to mention wedding gowns.

“Too bad this one has a train,” Kati Farkas mused, holding up a snowy, puffy-sleeved satin number by Alexander McQueen that looked like the dress Sleeping Beauty had worn to bed when she slept for a hundred years.

“*Ew*,” Isabel sniffed. “The train is definitely not the only thing wrong with it.”

The trunk show consisted of fifty-eight racks of dresses—including ball gowns, cocktail dresses, wedding and bridesmaid dresses, skirts, blouses, cardigans, and capri pants, two hat racks, and even a rack full of tiaras, veils, and scarves. The clothes were gorgeous and exquisitely made, but the girls were not being gentle with them. Clothes were strewn all over the claret-colored carpet, and the usually glamorous, gilt-accented ballroom looked like the walk-in closet of a fashion-crazed Upper-East-Side-dwelling Manhattan society hostess in a pre-getting-dressed-for-a-benefit alcoholic frenzy.

The throng of graduation-dress-hunting girls fell silent for a moment as a tall blond girl with enormous dark blue eyes

pushed open the door to the ballroom and handed her white-and-green leather Louis Vuitton Calla Lily stuff sack over to security. Behind her stood a tanned boy with wavy golden brown hair and glittering green eyes.

“I bet they’re late because they had to get a room first,” Rain giggled, nudging Nicki Button in the ribs. Over the weekend, Rain and Nicki had gotten Japanese hair straightening treatments together, and their dark brown hair looked unnaturally straight and glossy, like it had been glued on by specialists from Madame Tussaud’s wax museum in London.

“Look. Blair is totally pretending she didn’t see them come in. Oh my God, and Serena is, like, walking right up to her!” Laura Salmon whispered shrilly.

Their arms full of dresses, the other girls followed Serena van der Woodsen with their eyes as she floated toward a rack of elegant-but-still-a-little-dorky straw sun hats two feet away from Blair and began to try them on.

“Nice,” Nate Archibald commented unenthusiastically from where he slouched against the wall, looking more brooding and introspective than usual. This was the sort of trunk show where, instead of waiting in line forever for the two private changing rooms, most girls stripped down in between the racks to try things on. But Nate was the most desirable boy on the Upper East Side. Girls got naked at the snap of his stoned fingers, and it was still he who got ogled, not them. It was no surprise that he seemed unimpressed. It was also obvious from the way he kept his eyes trained on his limited edition Stan Smith tennis shoes that he was doing his best to pretend he hadn’t noticed that Blair—the girl he was supposed spend the rest of his life with but had fucked over only last week by fooling around with Serena on senior cut day—was standing only twenty feet away, glaring at him.

After walking in on Nate and Serena, Blair had sworn to herself that she would not freak out at the sight of them, grab the nearest sharp or heavy object, and hurl it at their heads,

shouting, “Cheating, horny fuckheads!” But she couldn’t help feeling more than a little pissed off by how good they looked together. The natural highlights in Nate’s hair were exactly the same pale gold color as Serena’s hair, and they both had the same healthy, sun-drenched glow, as if they’d spent hours together on a blanket in Sheep Meadow, kissing and getting tan. Serena was wearing one of Nate’s weather-beaten navy blue short-sleeved polo shirts, its collar faded and the hem frayed, and Nate’s cheeks sparkled a little in the bright ballroom light from the glitter in Serena’s pale pink Vincent Longo lip gloss.

Which might have been cute in other circumstances but was definitely *not* cute right now.

Still, there was something amiss in their togetherness. Nate looked thin and depressed, and Serena looked distracted and spacier than usual. Blair satisfied herself with the notion that they were definitely not happy. Nate was probably always too stoned to pay attention to Serena in the way that she passive-aggressively demanded. And Serena probably forgot to call Nate all the time. He pretended not to like constant calling, but he secretly needed it the way only children always need to be reminded that they are the center of the universe. With a private, smug smile, Blair went back to the rack of Ghost dresses she’d been sorting through in a halfhearted attempt to find something original and irresistible to wear for Constance Billard’s graduation ceremony, which was only two weeks away.

Exactly. Why waste energy on hating them when there were more important matters to attend to, like buying a dress?

Serena pulled off the hat she was wearing and tried on a black silk one with tiny faux pearls stitched all over it and a cropped black mesh just-over-the-eyes veil. She pursed her glossy lips at the mirror and decided she looked like Madonna in *Evita*, or some mobster’s trophy wife. That was

one of the things she loved about acting so much. She could bat her thick-lashed, deep blue eyes at the audience from behind a veil and suddenly she was a tragic figure badly in need of a little TLC or, at the very least, a stiff cocktail.

This particular hat was very dramatic, which was exactly the way she'd been feeling lately. Not depressed dramatic, or ecstatic dramatic, but behaving-in-a-way-that-wasn't-exactly-herself dramatic. She stole a sidelong glance at Blair, who was fervently flicking through a rack of dresses, refusing to even acknowledge Serena's presence. Serena exchanged the black hat for a hideous thick purple velvet headband with fake fruit and leaves sewn all over it. If only Blair would look her way, Serena knew she'd pee her pants with amusement. But Blair kept her back turned. Serena sighed. Only a week ago they'd been best friends again. Now this. She and Nate were together, and Blair wasn't speaking to them.

Hooking up in the bathroom at Isabel's party had been a total accident, and if Blair hadn't caught them, they probably would have left it at that. But it would have been just plain cruel to hook up in front of her and then not try to make it mean something. Though she and Nate had never actually discussed it, they both cared about Blair too much not to stay together so she wouldn't think it was just some random, horny hookup between two beautiful, self-centered people who couldn't control themselves.

Which, of course, it was.

Besides, it wasn't like being together was hard. They were both gorgeous, they loved each other—always had—and Serena's Fifth Avenue penthouse was only four blocks away from Nate's town house between Park and Lexington. Plus, all they really ever did was fool around because a) they'd known each other since they were toddlers, so there wasn't anything new to know, and b) even though Serena would have been happy to, they couldn't go all the way because Nate seemed to be having a problem lately. . . .

*Oh?* And what sort of “problem” might that be?

“Hey, Serena,” Isabel called over from the Stella McCartney rack. “I heard you got nominated for senior speaker by Mr. Beckham.”

Serena propped the purple-fruited headband back on its hook. “Really?” she responded with genuine amazement. Mr. Beckham was Constance Billard’s film teacher. She had stopped taking film in ninth grade and hadn’t even been at Constance the next two years. She’d been up at Hanover Academy, in New Hampshire—until she kind of missed the first few weeks of senior year and they wouldn’t take her back. Why would Mr. Beckham, of all people, nominate her for senior speaker?

Good question.

“So, are you going to do it?” Isabel persisted.

Serena tried to imagine herself standing at the podium in Brick Church on Park Avenue, addressing her class, dressed in their pristine white dresses and white gloves. *Oh, the places you’ll go. Our future’s so bright, we’re going to have to wear shades*, etc. She might have liked acting and modeling, but inspirational speaking wasn’t exactly her thing. Surely one of her other classmates would be way more into it.

“Maybe,” she replied, noncommittally.

*You bitch*, Blair thought, her ears aching from eavesdropping. Ever since the infamous bathtub incident at Isabel’s party, Blair had been obsessively determined to surprise everyone by rising above Serena and Nate’s stupid, hurtful behavior, making it look like she really couldn’t give a damn, and end the school year as the girl everyone most admired.

Not that she wasn’t already the girl everyone most admired. She’d always had the best clothes, best bags, best fingernails, coolest hair, and by far the best shoes. But this time she wanted to be admired for her courage, independence, and intelligence. And being senior speaker at graduation was definitely part of that package. Right now Vanessa Abrams,

Blair's unlikely, shaven-headed, black-wearing roommate, was back at Constance nominating Blair for senior speaker. But as usual, that sneaky bitch Serena had to go and fucking copy her.

The tricky part of it was, no one actually campaigned to be senior speaker. And usually there wasn't even a vote, because usually only one person got nominated. Becoming senior speaker was one of those things that just *happened*—another mysterious Constance Billard tradition that no one ever quite understood. Things were bound to get a little interesting now that two girls were about to be nominated.

Especially these two.

Serena understood instantly that Blair would think that she actually wanted to be senior speaker, which was totally not the case. But how could she defend herself when Blair wouldn't even look at her? Unable to resist, she pointed at the goth-wears-white Morgane Le Fay dress in Blair's hands. "Oh my God, that would look so amazing on Vanessa. That's who it's for, right?" she asked with a bright smile.

*Oh, so you think it's okay to talk to me?* Blair thought. *Wrong.* Unable to muster a succinct spoken reply, Blair shrugged and carried the dress over to the makeshift register set up on a banquet table near the door, paying for it with one of her three platinum credit cards, which were paid off by her mother's accountant, Ralph.

*This isn't going to be easy,* Serena thought with a theatrical sigh. "I'm not in the mood to buy anything anyway," she added out loud and glanced around for Nate. Fighting with Blair was always so exhausting. Especially when it involved being madly in love with Nate Archibald.

Or at least, pretending to be.

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Little, Brown and Company  
Time Warner Book Group  
1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020  
Visit our Web site at [www.lb-teens.com](http://www.lb-teens.com)

First Edition: May 2005

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Produced by Alloy Entertainment  
151 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001

**ON THE COVER:** gold sequined top—**Iris Singer**,  
peach dress—**Bibelot @ Susan Greenstadt**, pink top—**marc by marc jacobs**,  
denim skirt—**H&M**, jeans and jewelry—stylist's own

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CWO

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Von Ziegesar, Cecily.

Nothing can keep us together : a Gossip Girl novel / by Cecily Von Ziegesar.--1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: Only two weeks remain until graduation and there are more than a few surprises in store for the senior girls at an exclusive private high school in New York City, as they fill their last days together with boys, gossip, parties, and shopping.

ISBN 0-316-73509-4 (alk. paper)

[1. Interpersonal relations. 2. High schools--Fiction. 3. Schools--Fiction. 4. Wealth--Fiction. 5. New York (N.Y.)--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.V94Not 2005

[Fic]--dc22

2005014493