

All I Want Is Everything: A Gossip Girl Novel Study Guide

All I Want Is Everything: A Gossip Girl Novel by Cecily Von Ziegesar

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Plot Summary

This third novel in the popular "Gossip Girl" series focuses primarily on the romantic relationships of wealthy Blair Waldorf and her circle of friends and acquaintances. As Blair struggles to find the balance between preparing for her academic future and finding happiness in her romantic present her best friend, her ex-boyfriend, and her new step-brother all find themselves caught up in similarly unexpected and complicated relationships. Thematic questions considered include searching for fulfillment, the role of sexuality in relationships, and the importance of being yourself.

The novel begins, as do all the Gossip Girl novels, with an entry from the "Gossip Girl" online gossip column, in which the anonymous author posts titillating comments about individuals referred to only by their initials - B, N, S, A, D, V and J. As the novel itself begins, narration identifies the individuals by name and portrays their circumstances. B is wealthy heroine Blair, N is her stoner ex-boyfriend who is now going out with much younger Jenny (J), and S is Serena, Blair's best friend. A is Blair's new step-brother Aaron, who has a crush on her. D is Jenny's brother Dan, a moody aspiring poet, and V is his girlfriend Vanessa, a moody aspiring filmmaker.

As Christmas approaches, all the characters make plans to indulge their regular Christmas traditions, many of which involve travel. In the case of Blair and Aaron, they have been invited to join their respective parents (Blair's mother Eleanor and Aaron's father Cyrus) in St. Barts, where the two are celebrating their honeymoon. Blair and Aaron have been told they can invite a friend each, so Blair is taking Serena, while Aaron is taking his wealthy friend Miles who, like Aaron himself, has a crush on Blair. At the same time, several of the characters are also making plans for their futures in college. Blair is determined to get into Yale, her father's alma mater, but becomes angrily frustrated when her entrance essay is deemed unsuitable, and she has to rewrite. She almost decides to not go to St. Barts, but at Serena's insistence ends up going. For her part, Serena goes on the trip in part to avoid the troublesome attentions of a famous pop star who has become smitten with her. Meanwhile, Nate and Jenny are spending more and more time together, Nate seemingly unaware that Jenny is falling deeply and desperately in love with him. Finally, Dan struggles with writer's block which he comes to believe is triggered at least in part by sexual frustration, while Vanessa (who has more sexual experience than he does) struggles to figure out how to move both her relationship and her filmmaking career forward.

Complications for each of the characters begin to emerge. Blair has trouble with her essay and is also shocked by the news that her mother is expecting a child. Serena is attracted to Aaron, who in turn, is frustrated in his guilty attraction to Blair by the attention paid to her by Miles. A video filmed by Vanessa of Nate's and Jenny's romantic encounter in Central Park makes its way onto the Internet, where it becomes an unexpected sensation and causes difficulty for Jenny at home. Dan's writer's block comes to an end when he writes a scathing poem about what he sees as the slutty behavior of the women in his life, a poem that Vanessa sees as having outstanding quality and, much to Dan's anger, submits for publication.



Blair and Serena return quickly and unexpectedly to New York, where Blair hunkers down to focus on her essay and Serena plans a fabulous New Year's Eve party. Most of the main characters (with the exceptions of Dan and Vanessa) converge at the party, with Serena getting rid of the musician and hooking up with Aaron, Blair, and Jenny both getting over their feelings for Nate. Meanwhile, out in Central Park Dan watches Vanessa make a film and realizes how talented she is. The two of them acknowledge their love and desire for each other, and kiss passionately.

Throughout the narrative, comments by "Gossip Girl" reflect on, and foreshadow the action. At the book's conclusion, one last "Gossip Girl" commentary hints at questions to be explored in future books.



Part One, p. 1 - 18

Part One, p. 1 - 18 Summary

This third novel in the popular "Gossip Girl" series focuses primarily on the romantic relationships of wealthy Blair Waldorf and her circle of friends and acquaintances. As Blair struggles to find the balance between preparing for her academic future and finding happiness in her romantic present her best friend, her ex-boyfriend, and her new step-brother all find themselves caught up in similarly unexpected, complicated relationships. Thematic questions considered include searching for fulfillment, the role of sexuality in relationships, and the importance of being oneself.

"Hey People" - Gossip Girl chats excitedly about the flurry of activities in her upper class circle as Christmas approaches. She identifies the people in question only by their initials - D and V are together after resisting their mutual attraction for a long time, N is doing unexpectedly romantic things for J, and B and S are shopping for dresses for a social event / fundraiser featuring hot pop star Flow.

"The Belles of the Ball" - At the event described in Gossip Girl's posting, Blair (B) makes pointed comments about Jennifer (J) as she dances with Nate (N), Blair's ex-boyfriend. Serena (S) wonders why Blair and Nate broke up, narration revealing that she (Serena) and Nate "lost their virginity together" several years before. Narration describes the circumstances under which Blair is attending this particular fundraiser. Her mother has recently remarried to someone Blair doesn't like, her plan to lose her virginity to Nate on the day of the wedding fell apart when Blair found Nate kissing Jenny, and her plans to enter Yale (her gay dad's alma mater) without actually applying also fell apart, when she mishandled the interview. She also has to fight off the attentions of Aaron (her new step-brother), Miles (Aaron's friend) and Chuck (an aggressively horny member of Blair's circle of friends). As Serena offers Blair support, they are joined by two girls who want to be Blair's and Serena's friends, Kati and Isabel, who complain about how boring their plans for Christmas with their families are going to be. Narration reveals, however, that Blair has plans to go with Serena, her mom and her new husband, and Aaron to the Caribbean island of St. Barts, planning to be back in New York for New Year's. Eventually, Blair has enough of them all and stalks off to the bathroom, absorbed in her own frustration and ignoring the swelling furor over Flow's imminent performance.

"Rock Star Hottie Turns the Beat Around" Jenny is so thrilled at being out with someone as beautiful as Nate that she doesn't mind his dismissive comments about painting, his constant marijuana smoking, and his inability to take his eyes off Blair when she returns from the washroom. Just as she comes back, Flow calls her and Serena, the organizers of the event, to come to the stage and announce the total of the money raised for the "Be Kind" charity. Flow is so struck by Serena's beauty that he invites her to join him in his limo. The spontaneous Serena also invites Blair and the others (Kati, Isabel, Aaron, Miles, and Chuck). Blair is tempted to not go, but then realizes that riding through Manhattan in a rock star's limo is something her idol, Audrey Hepburn, would do, and



goes along. Meanwhile, Nate and Jenny have stepped outside so Nick can have another joint, Jenny hoping he's about to say he loves her. As the limo drives by, Serena shouts out the window for them to join the party. Jenny happily climbs in and is followed by Nate, but finds herself sitting next to a glaring Blair.

Part One, p. 1 - 18 Analysis

The first point to note about this book is that it is the third in a series of books focusing on the lives and experiences of wealthy Blair Waldorf and her similarly wealthy, similar extravagant, similarly hedonistic, and similarly self-centered friends. A couple of important characters introduced in the following section are less well-off, and their presence in the narrative provides something of a blue-collar, more working class balance to Blair and her circle. For the most part, however (and here is the second point to note about the book as a whole), everything about the bulk of the narrative is defined by the ready presence and availability of lots and lots of money. The point is not made to suggest that the problems and struggles of Blair and her friends are unrealistic and/or unlikely. On the contrary, on every social / economic level, young men and women struggle with questions of sexuality, relationships, identity and purpose. In fact, it could be argued that in spite of all the wealth at play, for all the ostentatious, name-dropping materialism of the narrative, and for all the exotic locations, the emotional struggles of Blair, Serena, Jenny, Nate and the others are in fact the struggles of any young person struggling to emerge into adulthood. They just have better shoes (and that's not really as flip as it sounds).

In terms of this particular section, there are several important points to note. These include its essential purposes (to provide exposition, necessary information about characters, situations and relationships), to set plotlines (i.e. the Serena/Flow relationship, the Jenny/Nate/Blair triangle, the lovesick Aaron subplot) in motion, and to introduce the main theme (an exploration of how sexuality affects and defines relationships). Finally this section also introduces, simultaneously, an important component of protagonist Blair's journey of transformation and another of the work's key themes. Blair's relationship to her idol, film star Audrey Hepburn is essentially one of adoration. Her emulation of Hepburn fuels and defines many of her choices throughout the narrative, but when faced with the need to define herself AS herself, Blair eventually finds a way to do so. In other words, the reference here to Blair doing what Audrey Hepburn might do is the initializing event in one of the novel's central thematic considerations - the need for, and drive towards, being oneself.



Part Two, p. 18 - 38

Part Two, p. 18 - 38 Summary

"D Might Save Himself for Marriage" An argument between wannabe poet Dan and wannabe filmmaker Vanessa (D and V from "Part 1 - Hey People!") reveals that Dan is uncomfortable about Vanessa having sexual experience while he remains a virgin. To end the argument, Vanessa initiates sex, but Dan puts on the brakes, wanting the relationship to be deeper and more meaningful before sex enters the picture. Filling an awkward silence with small talk, they discuss their plans to attend college (Vanessa for filmmaking, Dan for poetry), each expressing concern that the dark, personal nature of their work will prevent them from being accepted. Narration also reveals that Jenny is Dan's sister, and they live with their artsy, unpredictable father, who has invited Vanessa to have a holiday dinner with them. When Dan reminds her of the dinner, Vanessa tells him she'll go, but won't eat much - she wants to lose some weight over the break. He tells her he loves her the way she is, she tells him she loves him too, and the two snuggle.

"J Regrets Joining the Party" In the back of Flow's limo, there's a complicated set of flirty games going on. Serena flirts with Flow, who flirts back. Blair flirts with Miles, in the hope of getting Nate's attention. Aaron resents Blair's attention to Miles, and forces his way between them. Jenny sees Blair's attention to Nate, and tells him she needs to go home. As Nate and Jenny leave, Blair smirks. Nate takes Jenny home, and kisses her goodnight, already planning to go get stoned with his buddies. Jenny goes into her family's apartment, and asks Dan and Vanessa what they think about Nate. Narration reveals Dan's concern for his sister, but Vanessa assures Jenny that Nate's a decent enough boyfriend, and both Dan and Jenny are reassured. Although, as Jenny goes to bed, she reflects that she doesn't want a decent boyfriend, she wants passion.

"You Gotta Be Cruel to be Kind" After arriving at a hot nightclub Blair, Serena, Aaron, Miles, and Flow leave a sleeping Kati, Isabel and Chuck in the limo. Conversation reveals that the club is owned by Miles' father, that Flow is looking forward to spending time with Serena, and that Aaron feels he wants to go home. As Aaron leaves, Serena and Flow hurry into the club. Miles kisses Blair, saying he's wanted to do that all night. Blair accepts the kiss, and moves in for another one.

The narrative then includes the opening paragraph of Blair's entrance essay into Yale, in which she writes, "as specifically as possible" about a person who has personally inspired her - Audrey Hepburn, who "survived a difficult childhood and became a star who lived her life to the fullest."



Part Two, p. 18 - 38 Analysis

With the appearance of Dan and Vanessa in this section, the narrative does two important things. One, it presents a vivid contrast to Blair and her circle, with D and V (as Gossip Girl calls them) clearly struggling with different priorities, and in different circumstances. It's important to note, however, that on a certain level, D and V are struggling with exactly the same thing that B comes to struggle with - the drive to express and/or be themselves on their own terms, said struggle being one of the book's primary themes. This, then, is the second important thing that happens with the introduction of Dan and Vanessa, in that their narrative line embodies and defines that theme. At the same time, it's also important to note that a key component of that struggle, and therefore of the book's exploration of this particular theme, is how sexuality plays into and/or affects questions of self and identity. In fact, almost all the characters, to one degree or another, are affected by uncertainty about the relationship between sexuality and identity, and about sexuality in general. This, in turn, makes consideration of sexuality one of the work's important sub-themes.

Other important elements in this section include the interplay in the limo (an effective, pointed, almost satirical portrayal of how the smallest look, the smallest touch can play a big role in how young people view themselves and each other) and the brief excerpt from Blair's Audrey Hepburn / Yale admissions essay. The latter, specifically the quality of its writing, plays a key role in defining later events in Blair's journey of transformation. In other words, the excerpt is an important piece of foreshadowing.



Part Three, p. 39 - 54

Part Three, p. 39 - 54 Summary

"Hey People" (2) - Gossip Girl discusses the popularity of celebrities, commenting that they're not really different from anybody else. She then describes Serena and Flow getting cosy in the club, Blair and Miles doing the same, and Aaron returning home looking both cute and sad. Emails in response to the column describe Flow as gay and Blair as a "ho". She concludes with a bit of advice about upcoming midterm exams - don't study, relax.

In "Even Celebrity Girlfriends Take Midterms," Blair writes her French midterm exam, answering a question about her family with a sanitized version of her real opinion, and answering a question about what she wishes for not with one of the several wishes that run through her head (including never seeing Nate again) with commentary on her wish to get into Yale. Meanwhile, Serena writes her history midterm, her attention often broken by musing about Flow (who has been sending her flowers). She's also interrupted by a teacher, who wants her to autograph a copy of the newspaper where her and Flow's picture is prominently displayed in a gossip column. Soon she has to sign the papers of all the other girls writing the exam, several of whom have gossipy (and incorrect) versions of how Serena and Flow met. Narration reveals that Serena signs her autograph with the same words that Gossip Girl ends her "Hey People" columns - "You know you love me."

In "Sex, Love and Frankenstein," Dan is simultaneously writing an English lit exam, part of which involves commentary on the novel "Frankenstein". At the same time, he struggles to write a poem about his feelings for Vanessa, even considering her in terms of the characters in "Frankenstein". Meanwhile, Vanessa is writing the same history exam as Serena, at the same time planning her next film project, a film essay / documentary on life in Manhattan. Narration reveals her cynical point of view on some of what goes on there, referring particularly to "some anorexic twice divorced Park Avenue woman" who would eat only a few bites of an expensive, exotic dish and leave the rest to be thrown away. Narration also reveals Vanessa's intensifying sexual desire for Dan, further commenting that "Despite Vanessa's tough look and disdain for almost everyone else in the human race, she was just another curious seventeen year old girl. We're all the same."

Part Three, p. 39 - 54 Analysis

Occasionally throughout the book, narration incorporates sudden, pointed commentary on the wealthy, image-conscious social circle within which the action of the narrative takes place. This section contains a vivid example of that commentary - specifically, the comment about the "Park Avenue" woman, Park Avenue being one of the most expensive, status-defined areas of real estate in Manhattan. When these comments



appear, there is the very intriguing sense that beneath the apparent celebration of materialism and wealth that dominates the narrative, there is an undercurrent of sharp-eyed awareness about the superficiality of the lifestyle being portrayed. In other words, there is a subtle but clear sense of satire about the book, satire being defined as a form of social comment in which the traits/foibles of a particular group or perspective are exaggerated to make a point about their ultimate foolishness and/or shallowness. The comment about the Park Avenue woman is one of the more vivid examples of this in the novel. It could be argued that this is simply Vanessa's point of view, and the point is well taken. The fact remains, however, that combined with the over-the-top, excessive amount of product placement and materialism of the central characters, that the comment is more than a character's opinion. It's also important to note that this sense of satire could, in fact, be considered as a component of the previously discussed narrative perspective that beneath the superficiality and the self-indulgence of the central characters, there is a kind of universal longing for identity and belonging. To some degree, this adds hints of reality to the characters, making them less caricature and more human. This sense of universality is referred to almost explicitly in the narrator's comments at the end of this section, when the narrator interjects a comment that Vanessa's struggles are, in some way, those of everyone.

Meanwhile, the comment about Vanessa's curiosity at the end of this section is an example of a technique the author uses several times throughout the book - the momentary dropping of a relatively objective narrative point of view in favor of a subjective comment.

The novel "Frankenstein" is the story of a scientist named Frankenstein who creates a human being, or rather a version of a human being, out of the scavenged body parts of the dead. That "human being" is eventually brought to life, but proves to be unstable, unpredictable, and violent. "Frankenstein" raises several important thematic questions, but among the most important is the idea of whether it's justified and/or morally right for someone to interfere and/or reinvent the process of becoming a human being. The narration here suggests that in Dan's perspective on his relationship with Vanessa, Vanessa is the doctor and he, Dan, is the monster - in other words, that he sees himself as coming to life because of her. There are three points to note here. The first is that Dan, as portrayed, is far too self-absorbed and self-centered to ever let himself be affected and /or defined by someone else. The second is related, in that on several occasions throughout the narrative, Vanessa does indeed attempt to shape Dan's life, and with results that, in their own way, as negative and destructive as the attempts by Dr. Frankenstein to shape the life of his monster. Finally, the reference here can be seen as foreshadowing of those attempts.



Part Four, p. 54 - 72

Part Four, p. 54 - 72 Summary

In "N can't get B's Ass Out of his Head," in between exams, Nate has burgers with his buddies and reflects on the two women in his life - Blair with her beautiful ass, high expectations and destiny that she apparently shares with him, and Jenny with her "stupendous" breasts, easygoing attitude, and flexible plans for the future. She is, Nate theorizes, someone he can both come home to and take some distance from. As he prepares to smoke some marijuana before his next exam, Nate feels "like he'd worked something out in his head, although he wasn't quite sure what."

In "Maybe Guys are Like Clothes," in her health/sex ed class, Jenny endures the curiosity and taunts of some of her classmates as she eagerly responds to a question about whether a girl should be in love with a guy to have sex with him with the affirmative. The teacher suggest that for young women like Jenny and her classmates, they don't have to be in love to have a relationship, suggesting that relationships with boys are like trying on pants, looking for the right fit. As the conversation continues, Jenny muses on how Nate is actually like her favorite pair of jeans (see "Quotes", p. 64), and resolves to tell him she loves him.

In "An Extraordinary Answer to an Ordinary Question," Blair visits the school's college advisor, who tells her the Audrey Hepburn essay ("Part 2") isn't good enough, and that she has to rewrite it to contain "an extraordinary answer to an ordinary question" - Blair is being required to write more about herself and less about Audrey. Restraining her anger, Blair leaves the counselor's office, reflecting on how her Christmas vacation is not going to be spent in St. Bart's after all, but at home working on her essay. She runs into Kati and Isabel who chatter about exams, much to Blair's irritation, and ask about Serena. Blair, tempted by her irritation to have some fun with the two girls, tells them that Serena and Flow are engaged, that the trip to St. Bart's is going to be spent planning the wedding, and that if the two girls are really nice to Serena they might get to be bridesmaids.

In "Hey People!" (3), Gossip Girl publishes her Christmas wish list, which includes several pairs of expensive boots, acceptance to the universities she applied to, and "a life changing New Year's Eve." She also gossips about Blair (studying up on Audrey Hepburn), Aaron (walking his dog and looking longingly at the Billiard School), Serena (getting annoyed with Flow's gifts), Nate (getting stoned), Jenny (making Nate a Christmas card), Dan (throwing out his notebook full of writers' blocked poetry) and Vanessa (tracking one of the subjects of her documentary). Emailed responses to the column hint that Miles is going to be going on the St. Bart's holiday as Aaron's guest.



Part Four, p. 54 - 72 Analysis

There are several interesting elements in this section. First up is the potential, and ironic, paraphrase of the first "chapter" in this section - Nate, the narrative seems to indicate (particularly at the end, when he is dumped by two women in one evening) can't get his head out of his own ass. Then there is the hint, at the end of that same chapter, that something has been resolved in his situation, a mystery that draws the reader further into the narrative and which is resolved, at least to a point, when Nate continues to spend time with Jenny. Then there is Jenny's decision to tell Nate about her feelings (which foreshadows important events in future sections, having to do with revelations from both Jenny and Nate about their feelings).

The title of the next chapter can be seen as referring not only to the need for Blair to write a better Audrey Hepburn essay, but also back to Jenny's answer to the teacher's question in the previous chapter and to Blair's lies about Serena later in this chapter. Meanwhile, the revised Audrey Hepburn essay becomes a focal point for both Blair and the narrative in subsequent sections.

Finally, Gossip Girl's comments function here the way they do at several other points in the book - as summaries of transitional events that link the main plot points of the narrative, and as hints of developments to come.



Part Five, p. 73 - 90

Part Five, p. 73 - 90 Summary

In "Barneys Builds Character," Nate and Jenny meet outside Barneys Department Store on their date to take each other Christmas shopping (see "Quotes", p. 74), Jenny reflecting breathlessly on how much in love with him she is. After a few false starts, Jenny finds a colorful pair of boxer shorts with a sailboat on them, a gift she thinks is perfect because of Nate's love for sailing (Nate, almost in spite of himself, thinks they're "groovy"). For his part, Nate takes Jenny upstairs to the lingerie section where, quickly and with some embarrassment, she picks out a pair of white thong panties. Nate then suggests they go to a hotel for hot chocolate. As Jenny is worrying whether Nate really wants them to model their new gifts for each other and perhaps even have sex, they encounter Serena and Blair. Even though she's being polite (just the way Audrey Hepburn would), Blair can't resist being a little naughty, spraying one of Nate's hands with a scent that she knows will remind him of her. After Blair and Serena leave, Nate wonders whether Jenny has ever seen "The Nutcracker." When she says she hasn't, he makes plans to take her to a matinee performance before going over to her father's for dinner. "How," narration asks, "could she not love him?"

In "D Tries to Write about Sex in a New Way," Dan goes to a restaurant where he tries to write himself out of his writer's block. The more he thinks about it, though, the more he starts to wonder whether he's blocked because he's not expressing his love for Vanessa in a sexual way (see "Quotes", p. 84). Narration then comments on how Dan was stuck thinking about sex not in terms of the act but in terms of words (see "Quotes", p. 85). "Was sex," narration asks, "the cure for writer's block?"

In "V discovers Victoria's Secret," while filming her documentary, Vanessa finds herself in front of a lingerie store selling products by Victoria's Secret (see "Objects/Places"). Wondering whether some pretty underwear might help Dan get into the mood for sex, she wanders through the shop, amazed at the variety and amount of underthings to choose from. As she searches, she realizes that she doesn't even know what her bra size is, and asks a clerk for help. The friendly clerk agrees, even while the moody Vanessa insists that anything she buys has to be black.

In "Hey People!" (4), Gossip Girl comments on Aaron's crush on Blair, and on his reasons for inviting Miles to St. Barts - to keep Blair occupied so he (Aaron) won't have to think about her. She then also suggests that Serena is getting even more gifts from Flow, publishes emails spreading gossip about Jenny (being obsessed with her navel) and Blair's mom (getting mail from a fertility clinic).



Part Five, p. 73 - 90 Analysis

Several elements in this section develop the novel's thematic consideration of the role of sexuality in relationships (symbolized, throughout the narrative, by sexy underwear in general and, in the case of Vanessa and Dan, Victoria's Secret underwear in particular). Both Nate and Jenny's gifts have sexual overtones to them, although Nate's is far more overtly sexual. Jenny's recognition of this, and her subsequent fear that Nate is going to try to have sex with her, is the first of several instances throughout the narrative in which young women worry about losing their virginity in the right way and who, subsequently remain virgins. Among the other notable occasions of this is Blair's last minute backing off of sex with Miles in Part 8. Here it's interesting to note that the two young women who are no longer virgins, Vanessa and Serena, are portrayed as feeling varying degrees of guilt, remorse, or discomfort at having had sex. This combination of factors, it could be argued, suggests a somewhat conservative perspective to the novel's thematic view of sex in young people's relationships - that too much sex too soon leads to trouble. The idea is further developed when the narrative line returns to Dan, who is clearly portrayed here and throughout the rest of his plotline as both resistant towards, and resentful of, the wrong kind of sex before emotional commitment. Granted, his appearance here ends with him appearing to be headed in the other direction, but subsequent events in his and Vanessa's plotline (triggered by Vanessa's underwear purchase here) reinforce the aforementioned sense of conservatism about the narrative's thematic perspective on sexual activity in young relationships.

One last point to note about this section concerns the emailed comments in Gossip Girl's column. Because the first is so clearly bitchy teenage gossip mongering, the second appears to be the same thing - except that it's not. It is, in fact, the first of several hints / foreshadowings of the revelation in Part 8 that Eleanor really is pregnant. In other words, actual information is cleverly disguised by juxtaposition with falsehoods, as effective a storytelling technique as it is an effective gossip technique.



Part Six, p. 91 - 113

Part Six, p. 91 - 113 Summary

In "B is Stuck in Economy Class, Drawing Guys like Flies," on the plane to St. Barts, grumpy after a very early departure, Blair struggles to find the right words for the rewrite of her Audrey Hepburn essay. Meanwhile, Miles keeps flirting with her (she tries to respond with Audrey's coolness and tact), a Steward brings her an unrequested magazine and offers her a drink, and the pilot makes a flirtatious announcement about her over the intercom. Blair wishes she was on this trip with other people, but is excited about getting "out onto the beach, away from everyone and everything".

In "D is Ready, or Not," as he helps his eccentric father Rufus prepare an even more eccentric lasagna for dinner that evening, Dan agonizes over how he's going to ask Vanessa to have sex with him. Narration describes his feeling awkward that now he just wants to get it over with so he can write, as opposed to what he felt earlier.

In "V is in the Right Place at the Wrong Time," Chafing at the discomfort of her new sexy underwear and aware that she's late for dinner at Dan's, Vanessa (who is taking her camera equipment to dinner) finds the images of the Central Park winter too irresistible to film. Meanwhile, Nate and Jenny are walking through the Park, Jenny having had a wonderful time at "The Nutcracker" and Nate not getting high because he's enjoying Jenny's company so much. Awkwardly looking for a chance to tell Nate she loves him, Jenny reveals that she's wearing the underwear he bought her. Playfully wanting proof, Nate chases, and eventually tackles, her. Giggling and excited, Jenny blurts out her love. Nate responds playfully, but without saying it back. Jenny then asks whether he's wearing his boxers, and he pulls down his pants to show her he isn't. They then continue walking, Nate eventually wrapping Jenny in his coat. She again says she loves him, and this time he says he loves her back. As they kiss, narration reveals they are being filmed by Vanessa.

In "La Isla Bonita," having set themselves up in their private villa on St Barts, Serena waits on the porch for Blair, and accepts delivery of a bouquet of flowers. At first she's afraid they're from Flow, but is relieved when she discovers (along with Blair, who arrives just as Serena is reading the card that came with the flowers) that they're actually from Kati and Isabel. They then go to the dining room, where Miles, Aaron and Tyler (Blair's moody younger brother) have already arrived. They're soon joined by Eleanor (Blair's mother who, Blair thinks, seems to have gained some weight) and Cyrus (Eleanor's husband, whose loud and affectionate behavior, along with hints of a surprise, make Blair wonder whether her problems with bulimia are about to return). As the family sits down for lunch and Eleanor chatters, Aaron's knee makes contact with Blair's, narration commenting that the guilty surge of pleasure he feels is not something a brother is "supposed" to feel. As the family is eating dinner, they are surprised to see a plane skywriting Serena's name. Meanwhile, Cyrus' gushy behavior towards Eleanor becomes too much for Blair, and she rushes off to the bathroom to vomit. Serena



follows, "keeping her lovely blond head down incase Flow was somewhere nearby, lurking behind a palm tree."

Part Six, p. 91 - 113 Analysis

Narrative momentum and tension begin to build in this section, as the writing hints of several impending confrontations - Blair with her essay, Serena with Flow, Vanessa with Dan, Blair with the news from her mother and step-father, Aaron's with his desire for Blair, and almost everyone with the video of Nate and Jenny. At this, approximately the mid-point of the narrative, the reader is being effectively drawn into a position of wanting (needing?) to know what's going to happen next in all these escalating, thematically entwining plots.

Specific points to note include Blair's intensifying need to do well with her Audrey Hepburn essay (an escalation of both her internal conflict about her future and the novel's thematic consideration of the need to be oneself) and Nate's somewhat surprising sobriety. This indicates that, at least for the moment, his priorities are changing in the same way that Blair's is, in that both are letting themselves be less distracted by their respective identity crutches, for lack of a better turn. Then there is further foreshadowing of Eleanor's revelation, in Part 8, that she is pregnant (i.e. the reference to her weight gain), and the reference to the hummingbird. This can be seen as a metaphoric reference to Serena herself, portrayed throughout the narrative as flitting from one fun thing to another in the same way as a hummingbird flits from flower to flower. The comment is a foreshadowing of the later point in the narrative when, after all her flighty behavior she settles, for at least a short while, with Aaron.

Finally, there is the suggestion that Blair is troubled by an eating disorder. The latter is perhaps the most intriguing of all these, in that it suggests a more serious, darker undertone to the apparent superficiality of both Blair and the narrative in which she is the central focus. Granted, the novel comes across as primarily an entertainment, but like the previously discussed subtle satire in the writing, the hints of eating disorder here and the glimpsed universality of the feelings and struggles of the characters are all suggestions that there is more to this work than might at first meet the eye.



Part Seven, p. 114 - 136

Part Seven, p. 114 - 136 Summary

In "Who Really Wants to Know Victoria's Secret," Vanessa is already at the apartment of Dan and Jenny's family when Nate and Jenny arrive, and she (Vanessa) recognizes them almost immediately as the couple from the park. Meanwhile, Dan becomes increasingly nervous about when and how he's going to tell Vanessa about his decision to have sex with her, while Jenny is over the moon with happiness that Nate said he loves her and Vanessa worries about what Dan will think of her sexy underwear. Eventually, Dan can't stand the tension any longer, and takes Vanessa into his room for a talk. While he's working out what to say, Vanessa quickly peels off her clothes to reveal her new lingerie. When Dan sees what she's done, he immediately withdraws, thinking she's being too aggressive and spontaneous, and asks about Vanessa's films. Vanessa, feeling humiliated, immediately leaves. Dan sits down to write, but finds himself still blocked. "Weird how a thing like having your girlfriend dress in skimpy lingerie can totally change your relationship."

In "J's Art Freaks N Out," Jenny shows Nate her bedroom, where he is astounded to see that she has painted the crumbling walls with six different portraits of him in the styles of six different artists. Confused and a bit freaked out, Nate uses an unexpected phone call from one of his buddies as a cover to escape. Jenny tearfully says again that she loves him and watches him go, aware that she's not going to see him for days.

In "Hey People!" (5), Gossip Girl's column reveals that Vanessa's video of Nate and Jenny has been released to the internet, that Nate and Jenny are readily identifiable, and that no-one knows how it got posted. The second part of the column reveals that Blair and Serena are cooped up in their villa in St. Barts, that Flow is rumored to be there as well, that Blair's mother is vomiting every morning, and Aaron is spending a lot of time alone moodily playing his guitar.

In "S and B Let Boys be Boys," tired of hiding out in the villa, Serena convinces Blair to accompany her to the beach, and to sunbathe topless. After they arrive and take off their bikini tops, lying face up on the sand, Miles and Aaron become completely distracted, Miles wondering what the etiquette is for such a situation and Aaron taking refuge in being judgmental. Eventually, Miles approaches Blair and asks her to go to the Christmas Eve party at the resort that night, and she agrees. A while later, Flow appears and asks Serena the same question. She plays a little harder to get, but when he says he'll give her a nice Christmas present after the show, she agrees, narration commenting that a girl can never get too many presents, "especially ones from famous, criminally good-looking rock stars."

"The Link Explained" A confrontation between Vanessa and her sister Ruby reveals that Ruby had loaned Vanessa's camera to some friends of hers with a band, and that the band uploaded the video of Nate and Jenny to the internet. Meanwhile, Dan (who is



trying some writing exercises in order to get past his writer's block) is emailed the link to the video by a buddy, but isn't actually watching when his dad comes in, sees the video, and furiously calls for Jenny. Dan watches the self-repeating video as Jenny comes in, sees the video, reacts with shocked horror and embarrassment, and is yelled at by her father. She runs out, and her dad follows her, grounding her for the holidays despite her protests that she did nothing wrong. Dan, meanwhile, recognizes the camera work in the video as Vanessa's, wonders how both Vanessa and Jenny could do what they did, and starts a / new writing exercise with the word "sluts."

Part Seven, p. 114 - 136 Analysis

Sexuality, suppressed or expressed or only hinted at, plays an active and defining role in several conflicts and relationships in this section. Dan and Vanessa are essentially, if briefly (no pun intended) pushed apart by misunderstandings and miscommunications about sex. Nate is freaked out by Jenny's paintings which seem, to him, to be implying that a much closer relationship (probably including sex) is imminent. Blair and Serena both play sexual games with the boys/men in their lives (Miles and Flow respectively), while Blair's deliberately provocative topless sunbathing also sends Aaron into a sex-defined tizzy (albeit without Blair intending to). For its part, Vanessa's video also has sexual overtones, as clearly experienced by both Rufus and Dan. This last is particularly noteworthy, in that their reactions can be seen as the latest in several, previously discussed hints throughout the narrative of a conservative perspective on pre-marital sexual activity by young people. It could be argued that both Dan and Rufus are over-reacting in a significant way to what was, by all accounts, actually quite innocent. The fact remains, however, that in the context of the work as a whole (in which sex is often talked about, hinted at, and used as a tactic in relationship conflicts), the actual act of having sex is generally viewed as a negative - fun idea, but ultimately bad choice.

Other important points include yet another hint/foreshadowing of Eleanor's upcoming announcement that she is pregnant, the reference to Vanessa's unique style (which foreshadows the appearance, later in the narrative, of an influential filmmaker drawn to that style), and the reappearance of Flow, a key development in Serena's relationship subplot.



Part 8, p. 137 - 159

Part 8, p. 137 - 159 Summary

In "N Hosts a Little Reunion," narration describes how, at his wealthy family's Christmas retreat, Nate ritually gets together with a pair of buddies on Christmas Eve and gets high. This particular Christmas Eve is no exception, except Nate gets a surprise - his buddies have seen Vanessa's video, and tease him about it. Nate thinks they're joking, and responds to their questions about whether he's still with Jenny with a stoned "Not really."

In "B's Mom Lets Fly with her Surprise," while waiting for Serena to finish getting ready for the Christmas Eve party, Blair has a brainwave - she'll write her admission essay to Yale in the form of a screenplay about Audrey Hepburn in college, focusing on the kind of independence of style and thought Blair is determined to emulate. As she's starting to write, though, Serena appears, and convinces her to put work aside and come with her to the resort's Christmas Eve party. There, the two girls meet up with Aaron and Miles and, after a drink at the bar, all of them join Cyrus and Eleanor who immediately drop a bombshell - Eleanor is pregnant. As Blair sinks into shock, Aaron asks where the baby is going to sleep. Hearing that her room is going to be used as a nursery sends Blair into a tailspin that almost results in a bulimia attack, but then Flow and his band take the stage and Serena pulls all the young people onto the dance floor with her. Blair dances hard and angry, Serena catches the amorous eye of Flow, and Miles quite evidently falls further in lust with Blair, leading Aaron to regret inviting him. Blair, needing to be held and cared for, soon disappears from the dance floor with Miles. Serena sees how cute Aaron is (droopy with longing for Blair) and dances with him. In doing so, she makes Flow jealous.

In "B Decides to Lose It Once and For All," Blair hurriedly leads Miles back to his villa, where she determinedly takes off her dress and leads him into the bedroom. All thoughts of behaving like the well-bred, elegant Audrey Hepburn are gone. "Hello woman - goodbye, little girl." Back at the party, Flow approaches Serena and tries to confirm their post-show date. Serena, tired and becoming more into Aaron, puts Flow off until the morning. Flow returns to the stage and sings his favorite love song for Serena. She, meanwhile, sees that Aaron is uncomfortable and walks him out. They're heading back to the villa Aaron shares with Miles when Serena feels the urge to go for a late night swim in the ocean. Aaron refuses her invitation to join her, but watches from the beach as Serena revels in the night and the warm water. "Sometimes," narration comments, "it just felt good to be alive."

In "It Sucks when You Can't Find your Clothes," as Miles pays slow, exasperatingly detailed attention to her body, Blair becomes increasingly impatient, letting herself become distracted by memories of Nate. Suddenly, she decides to leave. When she can't find her dress, Miles turns on the lights to help her look, unaware that Aaron is at the door. Blair, noticing that he is unable to stop looking at her and feeling like he's



being very creepy for a stepbrother, grabs her dress, throws it on, runs out and heads for the beach, where she plunges into the water with no regard for her expensive outfit. When she emerges, she connects with Serena, and the two of them head back to their villa, Blair saying she wants to leave the next day. At first Serena protests, pointing out that the next day is Christmas, but then she discovers that Flow has sent her another expensive gift (a talking parrot trained to ask Serena to marry him), and decides she needs to leave as well.

Part 8, p. 137 - 159 Analysis

In terms of the narrative's thematic exploration of the importance of being oneself (as primarily exemplified by Blair's struggles with her Audrey essay and by Dan and Vanessa's struggles to stay true to their art), Nate's return to his pot-smoking habit can be seen as an example of how easy it is to be lured into not being himself. He had an experience of being aware, clear headed, surprised, and open when he was with Jenny. The opening "chapter" of this section, however, indicates that he is, at this point, ultimately unable to actually deal with reality (i.e. his and Jenny's feelings for each other), and so he takes refuge in the reality-altering effects of marijuana.

Here it's interesting to note that Blair's actions in this section can be seen as the beginnings of something similar to Nate's as outlined above. She runs away from reality, from her own feelings (i.e. the shock and anger of her mother's news) and attempts to (numb? drown? displace?) them by having spontaneous sex with Miles. The fact that she stops trying to emulate Audrey suggests just how blinding her desperation to avoid her new reality actually is, one avoidance tactic (sex) overwhelming another (Audrey). Unlike Nate, however, she doesn't succumb to the attractions of distraction and takes off, metaphorically washing herself clean of her mistake in the ocean. Granted, she's not yet fully connected with a side of herself that she can call her own. Her rethinking of the Audrey essay indicates she's on her way, but she does have some distance to travel yet.

Finally, it could also be argued that the flirtatious Serena is undergoing a similar experience with Flow, her budding attraction to Aaron perhaps hinting that there is something more to be gained from a relationship than simply fun. Events in the Serena/Flow/Aaron mini-triangle foreshadow events in the final moments of the narrative, in which Serena dumps Flow and hooks up with Aaron.



Part 9, p. 160 - 184

Part 9, p. 160 - 184 Summary

In "Hey People!" (6), Gossip Girl reveals that a film producer has seen Vanessa's video and has been trying to track her down, that Blair and Serena are back in Manhattan and planning a New Year's Eve party, and that Flow has returned the parrot.

In "Locked in a Tower," grounded and frustrated, feeling "like Rapunzel, only with shorter hair and bigger boobs", Jenny longs for Nate, imagines him pining for her, and prepares a "care package" with a few mementoes of her to help him think of her. Shortly afterwards, Jenny encounters Dan, who bitterly tells her Vanessa shot the video. When Jenny says she doesn't mind, Dan returns to his room to continue working on his poem about "sluts" (see "Quotes", p. 165/6). He quickly writes the poem and decides to email it to Vanessa. "Writing the poem," narration comments, "was the only way he knew how to figure out how he felt, and sending her the poem was the only way he knew how to tell her."

In "V Finds a Way to Apologize," Vanessa refuses an invitation from her sister to go out, missing Dan and wishing she could find a way to get him to listen to her explanation and apology. When his email with the poem arrives, she reads it three times and, in spite of recognizing his anger with her, also recognizes that it's beautifully and powerfully written. She decides to send it to a magazine that publishes poetry. "...what an amazing way to impress the colleges he was applying to" and "she owed it to him."

"Audrey Goes to College" begins with the first few pages of Blair's screenplay about Audrey Hepburn. Audrey takes a meeting with a professor, apologizing for her lateness by explaining she's involved in something illegal and giving him her paper on all of Shakespeare's plays. After leaving him reading, she rides her bike across campus, accidentally running into an attractive male student. While helping him up, a gun falls out of her purse.

In "S Gets All the Balls Rolling," Serena, realizing she needs help planning her fabulous New Year's Eve party and knowing that Blair is busy working on her screenplay, calls Kati and Isabel, knowing they'll do anything for her in the hope of becoming her best friends. They hurry over and immediately jump into action, but not before they ask Serena some awkward questions about Flow, whom Serena says has promised to come. Meanwhile, she also makes sure Aaron is on the guest list. At the same time, Nate opens his care package from Jenny, but is repeatedly reminded of Blair. He's interrupted by a cell phone call from Serena, making sure he's coming to the party. He agrees to attend only after she confirms that Blair will be there.

In "Tormented Artistes Break into the Big Time," Dan receives a letter telling him his poem "Sluts" is to be published on Valentine's Day. At first fearful that it's a joke, he realizes the letter is probably real and that Vanessa was the only person who could



have sent it in. Furious that she did so without letting him know, he storms off to confront her. Meanwhile, Vanessa's editing of her film is interrupted by a chat initiated by moviemaker Ken Mogul, who says he likes her work and wants to talk. Vanessa agrees to meet with him later that day, thinking it might be a hoax designed to lure her into a trap. "She was such a sucker for crank emails. But who knew? Anything was possible."

Part 9, p. 160 - 184 Analysis

Narrative momentum and suspense once again build throughout this section, as all the various narrative lines (Blair/Nate/Jenny, Serena/Flow/Aaron, Dan/Vanessa) head for their climactic convergence on New Year's Eve. Important elements are the various parallels between the narrative lines (in particular the "gifts" sent by Jenny, Vanessa and Flow, the negative reactions of Nate, Dan and Serena respectively to those gifts), and within one line in particular (the possibility of advancement for both Dan and Vanessa). Then there is the somewhat surprising content and tone of Blair's Audrey essay (would Audrey really carry a gun?), the irony of an angry poem about sexual women called "Sluts" being published on Valentine's Day, and the perhaps farfetched (but not entirely unbelievable) coincidence of Vanessa's video being seen by a successful filmmaker. Finally, there is the creation of the poem itself, which can be seen as a manifestation of the narrative's thematic interest in the process of people becoming themselves. Dan, in creating the poem, has finally found a way of getting in touch with both his feelings and the words that can give those feelings shape, function and purpose. His work has become a true manifestation of himself and not, as his work has appeared to be up to this point, a manifestation of what he thinks poetry should be.



Part 10, p. 185 - 200

Part 10, p. 185 - 200 Summary

In "Hey People!" (7), Gossip Girl publishes an email suggesting that back on St. Barts, Miles has been hanging out with a French girl, Aaron is back in Manhattan (as sad as ever), Flow is flying to New York, and Blair is planning to have a good time at Serena's New Year's Eve party. Her column concludes with a reminder to her readers that "our lives are better than the movies".

In "J Makes a Break for It" New Year's Eve, having spent the day getting herself ready for Serena's party and waiting for Nate to call, Jenny prepares to break her grounding and go out to the party. Meanwhile, Nate and his buddies smoke up, Nate imagining how horny Blair will be after spending so much time locked away working on her essay.

In "N is Still Wearing B's Heart on his Sleeve," as Blair arrives at Serena's fabulous party, dressed sexy and looking to get drunk, narration reveals that her screenplay is almost finished, all but the ending. While she's waiting at the bar, Nate comes up behind her, wearing a sweater she had given him with a heart-shaped diamond button sewn into it, so that Nate would always be wearing her heart on his sleeve." As she and Nate talk, Blair finds herself drawn into the familiarity and comfort of their conversation, and then surprised and happy that, according to Nate, he and Jenny have broken up. A buddy of Nate's comes by and comments on the video, but Blair's obvious lack of knowledge about it convinces Nate to downplay it, and their conversation continues.

In "A Finds a Distraction," Aaron arrives at the party hoping to be able to apologize to Blair for his behavior on St. Barts, but sees that she's busy with Nate and that there's no point in even trying. Serena dances over to him, happy to see him and luring him onto the dance floor where he realizes that Blair is not his to moon over, and that Serena really is gorgeous. "Somebody," narration comments, was about to have a very happy New Year's Eve."

In "Only in New York," Vanessa decides to take her camera and film the activity in Central Park. "Everyone who 'belonged' would be at Serena's party, so why not see what the people who didn't belong were doing?" She has a couple of encounters with eccentric strangers, and realizes that she's found the title for her documentary, "Only in New York." She continues filming, unaware that she's being watched by the filmmaker who contacted her, Ken Mogul. Meanwhile, Dan searches for Vanessa and eventually spots her making her film. He sits beside a man who seems to be watching her and who happens to admire her filmmaking style. The reader knows the man is Mogul, but Dan does not. Dan watches her too, realizes how sensitive and at ease she is, and realizes she would never misuse his material. In conversation with Mogul, he reveals he's about to have a poem published...



Part 10, p. 185 - 200 Analysis

As usual, Gossip Girl's column contains important hints and foreshadowings of narrative events to come (Serena's party, Blair's emergence from her writing exile, Aaron's moodiness, and Flow's trip, seemingly to attend the party). Also in this column, but somewhat less usually (although not uniquely), Gossip Girl provides a dash of thematically relevant insight, in this case the idea that life is better than / more than the movies, a clear reference to Blair's struggles to emerge from the dominance of her Audrey Hepburn fantasy and into a stronger, clearer sense of self. That struggle climaxes in the following section, as questions about her relationship with Nate and the resolution of her screenplay are answered in ways that suggest Blair is at least beginning to find herself.

Here it's important to note that several other main characters are in similar situations, emerging from a period of what might be described as an avoidance of reality, a delusion, and into a sense of more genuine identity. Jenny's leaving her apartment, and in particular the imprisonment of being grounded, can be seen as metaphoric foreshadowing of her leaving the "imprisonment" of her fantasies about Nate (which are in some ways similar to several other fantasies, Blair's about Audrey, Aaron's about Blair, and Flow's about Serena) and stepping into a sense of self and independence. It could also be argued that Dan is about to do the same, stepping out of a "fantasy" of anger and blame and into a more realistic perception of Vanessa's gift, her own talent, and the value of both his work and of seeing it published.

Other characters are making similar steps, in particular Serena and Aaron, who step out of their respective fantasies and into a reality with each other - a temporary reality, probably, but something more real than their respective fantasies nonetheless. Only Nate, by defining contrast, remains somewhat mired in his delusions, continuing to stay fogged in a haze of marijuana smoke.

Finally, a quick word about Ken Mogul. His name can be seen as the latest in a series of semi-satirical, somewhat comic elements (the name dropping, the occasional pointed references to the superficiality of the world's setting) that suggest the story, despite the occasional glimpses of darkness it contains, is not intended to be taken entirely seriously.



Part 11, p. 201 - 215

Part 11, p. 201 - 215 Summary

In "What She Wants is Not What She Has," Jenny arrives at the party, and after being drunkenly recognized as the girl in the video, sees Nate and Blair at the bar. She suddenly realizes that Nate never loved her, confronts him, and then storms out. Blair, meanwhile, sees Nate's haplessness in the face of Jenny's attack, and realizes that he's a loser and that she has so many more cute men to look forward to at college. She then dismisses Nate and goes out onto the balcony for some fresh air.

In "S Gets Serenaded," at midnight, just as she's about to follow Aaron out onto the balcony, Serena is stopped in her tracks by the arrival of Flow, who goes on one knee and sings a song he just wrote for her. Embarrassed, Serena hurries off with Aaron. Meanwhile, Blair is approached by a leering Chuck, but before he can say anything she directs him to Kati and Isabel, saying they've always had a crush on him. He goes to embrace them as the countdown to midnight continues ...

In "V and D Have Their Own Display," listening to Ken Mogul's egocentric monologue, Dan is trying to find the right words for the image of snow drifting through the light of a streetlamp when Vanessa returns. Mogul introduces himself and says he wants to work with her. As Vanessa is thinking about what to say, but imagining that she wants to be independent, Dan interrupts the conversation. Mogul asks who he is, and Dan says he's Vanessa's boyfriend, leaning in to kiss her hard. Vanessa kisses him back, excited about the possibility of their life together.

In "J Disses Famous Rock Star," as he finishes his song, Flow realizes that Serena has disappeared. Humiliated, he hurries into the elevator, where he sees a tearful Jenny and tries to hit on her. She tells him off and heads for home, looking forward to reading a good book. Meanwhile, Serena and Aaron watch the fireworks. Serena senses they're going to kiss, but is happily surprised when Aaron suggests they wait until after the fireworks are finished. "Now that the hummingbird had found a flower it wanted to hang out on for a while, all it wanted to do was land." Blair comes by and gets a brotherly hug from Aaron and a squealing, best friend hug from Serena before looking out over the harbor and realizing she's not going to give her screenplay a conventional ending.

In "Hey People!" (8), Gossip Girl comments on how everyone ended the evening - Chuck asleep on a couch with Kati and Isabel, Nate smoking up in the park, Vanessa and Dan holding hands in a bookstore, Serena and Aaron eating breakfast together, Blair buying coffee before buckling down and finishing her screenplay, and Jenny burning her paintings of Nate. The column and the book conclude with some key questions and a promise that next semester will be even better.



Part 11, p. 201 - 215 Analysis

A sense of new beginnings pervades and defines the action of this, the novel's climactic section. That sense begins with this section being set on New Year's Eve, a time of year perceived to be about, among other things, fresh starts, new opportunities, and changes in perspective. Within that context, it's clear to see that all the main characters are faced with endings to previously life-defining circumstances, or at least circumstances they BELIEVED to be life defining. At the same time, almost all are also faced with new beginnings and new perspectives. Most of these new beginnings / perspectives are related to opportunities to realize and act on a sense of personal identity - in other words, enactment of the narrative's thematic consideration of the importance of being oneself. For detailed consideration of this climactic section, see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the concluding section..." Here again, the exception and contrast is Nate, who is in theory at least presented with an opportunity for a new beginning but is too stoned (i.e. too caught up in avoidance of reality) to take advantage of it, or to even know that the opportunity is there.

The novel concludes (Gossip Girl's final column notwithstanding, with its sequel-triggering hints) with a similar sense of endings and beginnings, with Blair realizing that an ending IS, in fact, a beginning. The aforementioned hints from Gossip Girl about the future is not just good story telling and good marketing, but also carry a thematically significant resonance as well.



Characters

Blair

Of the large and complicated cast of characters, the centerpiece is beautiful, strong-willed, and ambitious Blair Waldorf, whose shares a last name with a long-established, very high-end hotel chain. Blair is in her last year at the Constance Billiard School for Girls and, over the course of the narrative, is driven to ensure not only that she has a great social and romantic life (which seems to be her priority) and to flaunt expensive, name brand possessions (which seems to be almost as much of a priority). She is also driven, perhaps for the first time in her life, to actively take responsibility for her future - after failing to gain admission to Yale University (her father's alma mater), which she thought was a given, she finds herself faced with the challenge of actually having to earn it. She is also challenged when her ex-boyfriend, Nate becomes involved with someone else; by her mother's new marriage and unexpected pregnancy; and by a stepbrother, Aaron, who seems to have feelings for her that go beyond fraternal interest. Over the course of the narrative, and as all these challenges come close to being overwhelming for her, there are hints that a previous problem with an eating disorder (most likely bulimia) is threatening to resurface. Throughout it all, however, Blair is guided and strengthened by the example of her idol, classic film actress Audrey Hepburn, whose elegance, independence, and confidence inspire Blair, on some level, to rise above her difficulties and determine to triumph.

Audrey Hepburn

The career of film actress Audrey Hepburn peaked during the 1950's and 60's, when she starred in such classic films as "My Fair Lady", "Breakfast at Tiffany's," and the Oscar-winning "Roman Holiday." Famous as much for her chic fashion sense as for her acting, she was an icon of style and elegance for several decades, and arguably remains so today. She is Blair's idol, and is referred to several times throughout the narrative as the inspiration (not always realized) for her behavior and attitude.

Serena

Serena is Blair's new best friend who is flighty and superficial. She and Blair had a falling out and weren't speaking for a while, but recently Serena was expelled from boarding school and reentered Blair's life. She is a party animal and an adventurer, and is metaphorically likened throughout the narrative to a hummingbird.

Nate

Nate is Blair's ex-boyfriend, the guy with whom she planned to lose her virginity but whom she caught kissing another girl (Jennifer) on the night of Blair's mother's wedding.



He is portrayed throughout the narrative as being heavily into drugs, primarily marijuana. He is so focused on continually getting and being stoned that his judgment is often clouded, leading him into troubled situations with the two women in his life, Blair and Jenny.

Jenny

Jenny is Nate's new girlfriend, only fourteen years old but very well developed for her age physically. She's knowledgeable about art and wants to be an artist herself. She has an intense crush on Nate that she believes is love, but which she eventually realizes is something much less. She is the younger sister of aspiring poet Dan and daughter of the eccentric Rufus.

Dan

Dan is Jenny's brother, an aspiring poet. Self-conscious and intellectual, high-minded and idealistic, he is as pretentious in his own way as Blair and her friends are in theirs. Throughout the narrative, he struggles with both writer's block and unfulfilled sexual desire, eventually deciding that the two are related. His inability to deal with both aspects of his life leads to complications with his similarly high minded, but more sexually experienced, girlfriend.

Vanessa

Vanessa is Dan's girlfriend, an aspiring filmmaker as determined to define her art and her life on her own terms as Dan is determined to define his. She is sexually experienced and eager, but feels self-conscious about her slightly overweight body. She attends the same prep school as Blair and her friends, but doesn't fit in with them or their lifestyle. In the aftermath of a misunderstanding about their having sex, she goes to extreme lengths to regain Dan's confidence, eventually doing so on New Year's Eve at the same time as she is being offered important career opportunities.

Aaron

Aaron is Blair's step-brother, dreadlocked and self-consciously cool. He has an interest in Blair that goes beyond the fraternal, and which leads him into a complex mixture of guilt, fascination, desire, and jealousy when he sees his friend Miles (see below) get further with Blair than he does. When Aaron finally realizes that Serena is interested in him, and that he has both the reason and the right to be interested in her, his tormented feelings for Blair resolve themselves.



Miles

Miles is Aaron's friend, someone he brings with him to the charity party that opens the book, who is interested in Blair physically, and who is invited by Miles as a guest to the new family's visit to St. Barts. While there, he comes close to having sex with Blair in the aftermath of her receiving surprising news about her mother, but she calls it off. The disappointment doesn't faze Miles, however, as Gossip Girl reports him as quickly becoming involved with another visitor to the island.

Kati, Isabel

Kati and Isabel, a pair of lower status rich kids, filled the best friend gap left in Blair's life by Serena's absence - that is, until Serena returned. Kicked to the side of the socially powerful Blair's circle of rich friends, they make desperate efforts to get in good with her.

Chuck

The sexually aggressive Chuck is a barely tolerated member of Blair's circle, but because he comes from the right sort of family and the right sort of money, Blair tolerates him (even though Serena can't stand him. His aggressive sexuality is an important, defining contrast to the more thoughtful experiences of sexuality (i.e. those of Dan, Vanessa, Jenny, and even Blair) of the characters around him.

Flow (Julian Prospere)

Flow is a successful, socially conscious pop star. His participation at the fundraising event organized by Blair and Serena helps them raise a substantial sum of money for an animal shelter. He falls in love with Serena, pesters her with expensive gifts, and eventually publicly proclaims his feelings for her at Serena's New Year's Eve party. She rejects him, and in his humiliation he hits on Jenny, who also rejects him.

Eleanor and Cyrus

Eleanor is Blair's mother. Cyrus is Eleanor's new husband, Blair's stepfather, and Aaron's biological father. Eleanor is superficial and somewhat thoughtless, while Cyrus is a sensitive gentleman towards her but a bit of a boor to others. The announcement that they're expecting a baby sends shockwaves through the lives of their respective children. He a sensitive gentleman towards her but a bit of a boor to others.

Tyler

Tyler is Blair's younger brother, cynical and anti-social, and just as unhappy as Blair is with the news of the impending baby.



Rufus Humphrey

Rufus is Dan and Jenny's eccentric father. He prides himself on being liberal and open minded, but not when it comes to Jenny's burgeoning sexuality. His angry grounding of Jenny following his glimpse of her in Vanessa's video (see "Objects/Places") provides an obstacle for Jenny's plans to build her relationship with Nate, but not an insurmountable one.

Ken Mogul

Famous independent moviemaker Ken Mogul sees Vanessa's video (again, see "Objects/Places", likes the film-making it reveals, and tracks her down with the intention of hiring her. In his brief appearance at the end of the narrative, he comes across as pretentious and self-centred.

Gossip Girl

One of the trademarks of the "Gossip Girl" series of books is the interjection, at key points in the narrative, of (excerpts? reproductions?) of the "Gossip Girl" online column, or blog, in which the actions/situations of the main characters are focused on, commented upon, foreshadowed, or explained. There are also occasional insightful comments that, in some cases, contain references to important themes.



Objects/Places

Manhattan

The island of Manhattan is the centerpiece of New York City. Home to much of America's wealth, and indeed much of the world's wealth, Manhattan is also viewed as a center of high society, of partying, of good times, and of casual and almost thoughtless extravagance.

Central Park

In the heart of the island of Manhattan is Central Park, an oasis of greenness and trees in the middle of the urban jungle that surrounds it. Sometimes romantic, sometimes violent, often the place where eccentrics and lovers alike hang out, it is the setting for some of the novel's most important scenes (the romantic encounter between Nate and Jenny, Vanessa's filming of that encounter, and the late-in-the-narrative reconciliation between Vanessa and Dan).

The Constance Billiard School for Girls

This is the expensive private school where Blair and her friends go, both to obtain their education and pursue their social lives, which in many cases seems to be as much of a priority (and for Serena, even MORE of one). Vanessa also attends this school, but feels extremely uncomfortable there with the other, more "upper class" girls.

Yale University

Prestigious and expensive Yale is the university to which Blair is determined to go. It was the university attended by her father and she assumes she has an easy in, but is both shocked and surprised when she discovers that she's actually got to work for it.

Riverside Prep School

This school is the high-class equivalent of the Billiard School, only for boys. Dan, Chuck, Nate, and Nate's buddies all go there.

Barneys

Blair, Serena, Nate and their friends like to shop at the high-end department store Barneys. In the novel, the store is the setting for important encounters between Nate and Jenny as well as between Nate and Blair.



Sexy Underwear (Victoria's Secret)

In several of the relationships featured and/or followed by the narrative, sexy underwear plays a triggering and/or catalytic role in either moving them forward (Nate and Jenny) or stopping them dead (Vanessa and Dan). Victoria's Secret is a well-known manufacturer of just that sort of undergarment.

St. Barts

St. Barts is the nickname to Saint Barthélemy, an island in the Caribbean Sea on which there is a number of resorts, many of which are high end and often frequented by the so-called "rich and famous." Eleanor and Cyrus invite their children and their friends to a Christmas vacation on the island, and it is there that Blair, Serena and Aaron all have important, life defining encounters.

The Humphreys' Apartment

Dan and Jenny live with their eccentric father Rufus in a rambling, cluttered elderly apartment, light years distant from the living circumstances of most of the other, wealthier characters.

Jenny's Bedroom

Jenny's bedroom is lined with portraits she's painted of Nate, each done in the style of a different artist. Seeing those paintings on a visit to the room results in Nate's realizing she cares more for him than he wants, and in him taking off.

Vanessa's Video

Filmmaker Vanessa records a pair of lovers interacting with romantic playfulness in Central Park, but does so without knowing that they're Nate and Jenny (the younger sister of her boyfriend). When the video is uploaded to the internet, it becomes something of a sensation, and also the trigger for conflict for both Jenny and Nate. It also, however, earns Vanessa the attention of indie filmmaker Ken Mogul.

Jenny's Package

Jenny's "care package" for Nate, sent to help him pine for her, contains her cherished copy of the romantic classic "Romeo and Juliet," a nice picture of her on the beach, her program from "The Nutcracker," some of her favorite (but forbidden) food (i.e. some PopTarts), and a lock of her hair.



Themes

Searching for Fulfilment

On first glance, the narrative and thematic perspectives of this particular book could be seen as more than slightly superficial. This is arguably because the writing places so much focus on brand names, because most of the characters seem to define themselves and their value by the social status of their friends, their hangouts and their other activities, and because most of those same characters appear extremely self-absorbed. It could also be argued, however, that on some level, the author chooses to emphasize these aspects of her characters' lives and world in order to make a point about them, not only that they are superficial and essentially empty, but that they are on some level aware of that emptiness and looking for something to fill it. In other words, the narrative's thematic and narrative perspectives seem anchored in the principle of (to paraphrase) "It may seem that money can buy happiness, but ultimately it can't."

The point here is this. If the work was only about self-indulgent, self-ignorant parties, there would be no sense of potential layers of meaning at all. On the other hand, though, there are characters like Jenny, Dan and Vanessa, who seem to be both aware of and searching for something more in their lives. Even self-absorbed, petulant, manipulative Blair is challenged to look more deeply into herself and her desires/ambitions than ever before. For these reasons, there is the sense about the work that all the partying, all the gossip (and in Nate's case, all the pot smoking) really is about a search to fill some kind of profound emptiness. This point is not made to suggest that the novel is, at its core, a darkly subversive mediation on social malaise. It comes too close to what in contemporary terms is often described as shopping porn for that. It would, however, do the work a disservice to avoid acknowledging the undertones that are clearly there, and which manifest in a couple of important subthemes.

The Role of Sexuality in Relationships

For many of the characters (including, but not only, Blair, Jenny, Dan, and Vanessa), a particular aspect of life that they long to be fulfilling is their experience of sex. This is especially true of Dan and Vanessa, whose entire narrative line is based, to a considerable degree, on conflict over what terms they want to include sexual activity in their lives - what it means, how and when it happens, and most importantly, why it happens. Jenny is fearful of sex with Nate for similar reasons - she wants it to have meaning, and to be a reflection on their love for each other. Blair's relationship with sex appears to be more superficial, in that she doesn't appear to have any particularly intense feeling one way or the other about with whom and under what circumstances she loses her virginity. When juxtaposed to the situations of the above mentioned characters, however, and within the context of the novel as a whole (which, as previously discussed, seems to have a somewhat conservative view on sexual activity), there is the sense of something more going on. Witness her decision to back off from



her impulse-driven encounter with Miles, and her rejection of the easy, casual connection she once shared with Nate. She may not recognize it, and in fact probably doesn't, but the novel seems to be suggesting that, perhaps unconsciously, Blair wants to delay her first time (and, for that matter, other sexual activity) until she, like Jenny and the others, does it for reasons of intimacy, connection, and vulnerability, rather than reasons of horniness or impulsivity. Contrasting characters like Chuck, for whom sex appears to be as recreational an activity as Nate's pot smoking, reinforce this idea - sexuality, in the narrative's thematic perspective, is most healthily expressed within an emotional and respectful context, and can therefore become an aspect of the fulfilment so many of the characters seem to be seeking.

The Importance of Being Oneself

A second subtheme also explores an important aspect of personal fulfilment, the need to be / importance of being oneself as opposed to defining oneself according to the standards, perspectives, and wishes of others. Again, the primary examples / manifestations of this are Blair, Dan and Vanessa. For Blair, her obsession with and emulation of Audrey Hepburn deflects her from having insight into, and a connection with, who she is as a human being (so too do her social and material obsessions, but one thing at a time). The process of Blair breaking through her "Audrey-ness" and at least beginning to connect with her "Blair-ness" is an important manifestation of both this sub-theme and, therefore, of the main theme. It's clear she still has a long way to go, but over the course of the narrative she makes a start.

Similar points could be when it comes to Dan and Vanessa. They begin the narrative with a stronger sense of who they are, what they want, and what they're about than many of the other characters. Their struggles are more concerned with, and defined by, the obstacles they face to being and/or living according to their beliefs, which primarily have to do with their artistic values and aesthetics but also have to do with uncertainties or un-clarities about their sexuality. They each are presented with opportunities for career and/or life advancement that briefly cause them to question their values (Vanessa's opportunity to work with Ken Mogul, Dan's opportunity to have his work published, shifts in perspectives on sexuality in each other). But in confronting those obstacles and in examining the reasons why they do and believe what they do and believe, they each come to a stronger and more confident sense of who they are as artists and as people. In other words, they are more themselves than when they started.

In short, the journeys and experiences of all three characters, therefore, can again be seen as manifestations of this sub-theme and, because this sub-theme is an aspect of the main theme.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written primarily from the third-person and omniscient point of view. This means that the story is recounted from the varied and frequently shifting perspectives of the characters, sometimes within a few pages of one another. A section might begin with focus on Blair, shift to Serena, then to Jenny, then to Nate. This frequent, almost constant movement of perspective reinforces and/or manifests one of the work's central narrative conceits, that ultimately the book is about a circle of people, not necessarily just one (although Blair is, unarguably, the dominant figure IN that circle).

Occasionally throughout the narration, the author interjects a different point of view (aside from the Gossip Girl sections, which come from a different point of view altogether, one that simultaneously comments on the narrative and nudges it forward). This occurs when the narrator inserts commentary on the action, characters, or situation in a voice and perspective very different (more subjective) than that of the objective narrative voice (for an example, see the end of Part 3) . There is a sense of wisdom and insight about these comments, reinforcing the previously discussed notion that on some level, and despite the vividly evoked specifics of the book's wealthy, materialistic setting, there is a fundamental universality to the work. In other words, these interjections of commentary reinforce the sense that the struggles of Blair and her friends (see "Themes") are, on a significant level, universal and/or archetypal. Here again, look at the end of Part 3, in which the narrator comes right out and says, "We're all the same."

This, in turn, leads to the question of the work's thematic point of view. As discussed above, and several times throughout this analysis, the concerns of Blair and her friends, seem to be written from the point of view, both narrative and thematic, that most young people of that age, at least to some degree, regardless of social or economic status, have them as well.

Setting

The book's setting is a perhaps unusually important component of its overall sensibility and tone. Almost all the action takes place in locations that emphasize, and allow for manifestations of, the wealth and social status of the book's main characters. The island of Manhattan (with its high-end department stores like Barneys), the island of St. Barts (a vacation retreat for the rich and famous, to use a somewhat cliché phrase), and the recreation retreats of Upper New York State are all defined, as places and therefore as settings, by being frequented by people with money and social standing. It's a world of self-indulgence and, at times, of insensitivity, of selfishness and flightiness, as rich people search for new and exciting ways to have fun and/or to show off how much money they can spend during that search.



It's important to note, however, that there are also characters whose stories come to life and/or are played out within a very different context. Dan, Vanessa and Jenny come from a very different world, one in which money and status play a very different role. They have neither, seem determined to reject the influence and/or desire for the former, and define the latter in very different terms from the other, wealthier characters. Dan and Vanessa in particular define themselves, and define success in their lives, in ways that relate more to who they are as individuals and human beings than to what they were (i.e. fulfillment of talent and potential, an interest in a range of human experience beyond the superficial). In short, the contrast of settings highlights and defines the contrast between lifestyles and perspectives but, at the same time, reinforces the previously discussed idea that on some level and despite their very different circumstances, the characters are all searching for and/or struggling with the same things.

Language and Meaning

Language in this book is used in several interesting ways. Perhaps the most obvious is in the evocation of both setting and character context, with the constant naming of high-end, expensive clothes, accessories, places, and even beverages (i.e. product placement) vividly defining both place and attitude (i.e. of Blair and her circle). There is also the sense, however, that there is something in this use of language beyond the evocation of setting. Because the narrative makes such an obvious point of defining the characters by which expensive shoes they wear, dresses they toss away, vodka they drink or department store they frequent, there is also a sense that this language is, in fact, somewhat satirical.

Satire, as previously noted is defined as an exaggeration of a particular characteristic of a person or group of people so that the ridiculous and/or the fatuousness of that characteristic and / or those people can be vividly seen. Is the book's portrayal of Blair's class of people as obsessed with brand names and with materialistic status exaggerated? Probably not by much, but the point here is this. There is such a vivid contrast between the amount and quality of words used to describe Blair's world and those used to describe Dan's and Vanessa's world that the former cannot help but come across as exaggerated and therefore as satirical.

Other important elements of language usage include frank crudity, the different qualities of language reflecting different points of view and perhaps most importantly, the occasional points at which the narrative's interjections of commentary hint at the universality and essential humanity of the situations in which the characters find themselves. The contrast between this particular use of language and the materialism-obsessed language of the main narrative is clear and vivid, pointed and meaningful.

Structure

The book's narrative structure is essentially linear and straightforward, with events in the plot defined by clear relationships one to the other. Cause leads to effect leads to action, which leads to reaction, which leads to further action, and so on. There is a period of exposition, an escalating of narrative tension to a point of climax. In short, the work's overall structure might be described as tried-and-true, traditional, and/or conservative. Within that framework, however, there are a couple of intriguing variations that add narrative interest to the piece without derailing the book's forward momentum and which, in fact, might be seen as enhancing and/or heightening it.

The first variation in narrative structure is the occasional interjection of the Gossip Girl commentaries, which drop hints both about the meaning and implications of what has just happened and offer intriguing hints and/or foreshadowing of what is to come. They are like mini-jolts of narrative adrenaline, working to increase the reader's interest in finding out what's going to happen next. The interjections don't interrupt the forward momentum of the narrative as much as they give it a bit of a goose, spurring it and the reader on. The second narrative variation to note is how the narrative shifts back and forth between the characters. There is a sense of all the various narrative lines entwining and interrelating, even to the point of events in one triggering events in the other. The sense here is one of several highways starting from the same place (i.e. the fundraiser) and going off in their own routes to the same destination, which turns out to be New Year's Eve.



Quotes

"Blair was always imagining herself as the heroine of some black-and-white fifties movie, in the style of Audrey Hepburn, her idol. This time it had been her downfall" (Part 1, p. 5).

"She didn't go crazy over famous people, like most girls. She didn't need to: she was the constant star of the feature film playing in her head, the most famous person she knew" (Ibid, p. 11).

"To Dan it WAS a poem. Probably the most important poem he would ever write" (Part 2, p. 23).

"Blair was trying to maintain Serena's devil-may-care attitude. She could do this. She could have random fun with a random boy who wasn't anything like Nate. Besides, after tonight she'd never have to see Miles again if she didn't want to" (Ibid, p. 37).

"If boys were like clothes, the way Ms. Doherty said, then Nate was like her first pair of Diesel jeans that she'd bought and only worn on special occasions because they were so nice...but the more she wore them and the more she washed them, the better they fit, until it got so she couldn't live without them - they were the perfect fit" (Part Four, p. 64).

"Jenny had spent more money since she'd been going out with Nate than she had in her whole lifetime. As any girl will tell you, looking good is expensive, but so, so worth it" (Part 5, p. 74).

"She loved the way he called her Jennifer. She loved the cute little text messages he sent to her cell phone. She loved his wavy golden brown hair and his always tanned, perfect skin. She loved how he did things like kiss her hand. And best of all, she loved how with only a few words in his sexy voice he could make her feel like the luckiest girl in all of Barneys, and that was really saying something" (Ibid, p. 75).

"Sex was the ultimate physical expression of love, which was why, when he ever actually did it, he wanted it to be at the moment when the only way to say what he truly WANTED to say was to make love" (Ibid, p. 84).

"The more he agonized over which words to use, the more convinced he became that he couldn't write about sex because he hadn't had it yet. And if he couldn't write about sex, he couldn't write about love, and if he couldn't write about love, he couldn't write about anything at all" (Ibid, p. 85).

"[Blair] didn't really want to hear about Audrey's colitis problem or her work with UNICEF. It was so much more interesting to imagine what Audrey's life had been like than to read the real facts" (Part Six, p. 92).



"...how often did you see a woman baring her naked bottom in the snow? How often did you see a totally clean cut guy pulling down his pants in broad daylight in the middle of winter? And how often did you see a couple rolling around inside the same overcoat in the middle of a frozen pond, in the middle of the busiest city in the world?"

"Near the deck railing, a hummingbird was sucking pollen from a hibiscus bush, flitting from flower to flower. Serena wondered why it didn't just stay on one flower and take a good long drink instead of moving around so much" (Ibid, p. 106).

"Anyone could walk by and take a look, and then later on at dinner they'd see her all dressed and be able to imagine exactly what she looked like naked. Think about it made him feel dizzy" (Part 7, p. 126).

"Everything always seemed so right when she was with Nate. They were like the corner pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. They fit together perfectly, and when they were together, everything else made sense" (Part 8, p. 156-7).

"It was going to be an angry poem, of course, but it wasn't ABOUT being angry. It was about finding out that the person you love isn't the person you thought they were. Jenny wasn't the sweet, innocent little sister he'd thought she was, and Vanessa was a slutty-underwear-wearing Peeping Tom who used other people's private moments to get attention" (Part 9, p. 165-6).

"She could see that Nate was trying to talk to her like nothing had happened, like he hadn't dumped her for a preschooler and spent the last month avoiding her entirely. It was kind of irritating, but it was also kind of wonderful, like the part in her screenplay where Audrey realized that Colin had been just as terrible to her as she'd been to him and she decided to love him even more for it" (Part 10, p. 193-4).

"Only in New York would you find a woman and her poodle in matching mink coats running in a midnight race with that weirdo in the cutoffs. And now she had a title for her film essay, too: 'Only In New York'" (Ibid, p. 198-99).

"As they kissed, fireworks began to light up the sky overhead. It was the sort of cliché that could ruin a film or poem, but this was way better than a film and way better than a poem. It was the real thing" (Ibid, p. 209).

"It wasn't really going to end ... not with any sort of finality. The best stories never did. Maybe she'd just cut to the next morning. Audrey would have a funny little exchange with the deli guy she bought her coffee from. Then she would laugh to herself, take a sip of her coffee, and walk out the door and into the street, leaving everybody guessing" (Ibid, p. 213).

"Will B ever lose it? And if so, with whom? Will N redeem himself, even though we'll still love him if he doesn't? Will S settle down and stick with A for longer than a day? Will D be ready to do it with V now that he's a published author? Will J find true love" (Ibid, p. 215).



Topics for Discussion

The narrative develops parallels between Blair and several other characters. Discuss the similarities in experience Blair shares with Serena, Jenny and Vanessa. Consider elements including, but not limited to, chapter titles, activities, perspectives, and discoveries.

Research BOTH the film career and the life of actress Audrey Hepburn. In what ways does Blair succeed in living up to her example? In what ways does she fail? Would it be fair to say that there is a significant degree of irony in Blair's choice of Ms. Hepburn as a role model? Why or why not?

In what ways are Vanessa's various efforts at changing/moving along her relationship with Dan reflective of the goals and actions of Dr. Frankenstein, as outlined in "Part 3, Analysis?"

Consider the last two sections of the book (Parts 10 and 11). In what ways do the events of this section mark both endings and beginnings for the main characters - Blair, Serena, Dan, Vanessa, Jenny and Nate - and in what ways do both the endings and the beginnings reflect the narrative's thematic interest in the issue of becoming oneself?

Discuss your experiences of searching for and finding fulfillment and meaning in your life. What makes you feel most like yourself? How did you discover that aspect of your life? How did it feel when you made that discovery? On the other side of the coin, what does it feel like to be UN-fulfilled? How do you distract yourself from those feelings and experiences?

What role, do you think, does sexuality play in your experience of being fulfilled as a person? What role do you think it SHOULD play? What are, in your opinion, appropriate ways to experience sexuality in a relationship? When Jenny's teacher talks about trying on relationships in the same way as one tries on a pair of pants, do you think sexuality is, or should be, part of the experience? Why or why not?

In what ways do you see the experiences of Blair and her friends as being universal? How do you relate your own experiences with sexuality, finding yourself, and in discovering what's uniquely fulfilling for you?