

A BRADFORD NOVEL

GoldenGirl



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SIMON PULSE

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Hugest thanks to my favoritest friendlies:
the FlirtyGirls, the Pulse team, Jodi Reamer,
and, as always, the Ostow clan.

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DEDICATION

For Noah,
the best thing I ever found online.



GoldenGirl: is totally feeling that first day back.
In opposite world.



THE BRADFORD BLOG

9/2, 1:43 p.m. by Spencer Kelly

BACK TO COOL

Well. Welcome. And first things first:

Let me just say that anyone who's visited my Facebook page in the last twelve hours or so knows that I am *so* not the morning person. Neither am I big on all that momentous, welcome-y, let's all get to know each other in a learn-and-share-and-hug-and-grow sort of way garbage. We've got Ms. (*not* Miss, never, ever *Miss*) Malucci, guidance counselor to the celebutantes for that, anyway.

So yeah, first day, we're all here. Some more shiny new and gleamy than others (I'm looking at *you*, Paige Andrews, flaunting a tan that makes Jennifer Aniston look pasty and peaked), but ready like the sponges that we are, to *absorb*. To *learn*. To *soak it all in*.

Ahh, who are we all kidding? The only thing the unfortunate B-listers want to know is how extremely extra fabulous the opening of Soirée, Miss Madison Takahashi's father's haute-spot for fashionable food, truly was.

(The A-listers already know. Lesson over; class dismissed.)
Trust me. You wish you'd been there. And not only because Mads was modeling one of her most recent original creations: hot pink satin shift, sleeveless, belted, bubble skirt. Louboutin snakeskin stilettos to match. Heaven, obvs.

Anyhoo, darlings: new year, new yous, new teachers, new classes, and, if we're lucky, a spankin' new Pinkberry machine in the caf.

But.

All firstliness aside: In the grand tradition of everything old being new again, I have to point out one image that I, for one, am curious to see:

Jeremy Brown, 2.0.

I guess the safari's out.

It's a good thing, too, 'cause class is most certainly *in*.

Bienvenue and *besos* . . .

xx,

SGK

1 RESPONSE TO "BACK TO COOL"

CatPower says: I saw Madison's dress, btw. Hot. Almost as hot as JB. *Swoon*.

Madison_Ave: is experiencing the after-effects of a night spent in four-inch heels. But it hurts so good.

9/3, 12:54 a.m.
privacy setting: VIPs

THE RULES OF DISENGAGEMENT

On the subject of chance encounters: There should be a special provision, or some other sort of rule. Some foolproof method of keeping certain boys out of one's face when one least expects to see them.

Specifically, one should not have to worry, when one is idly strolling the verdant campus of her lush private school, about running into the boy with whom one has [insert barfy, pseudo-literary virginity-losing metaphor HERE]—approximately fourteen months ago, in a carriage house (a totally romantic and dimly lit carriage house, that is).

One tries not to dwell on those carriage house memories, romantic and dimly lit though they may be. Making this sort of impromptu tête-à-tête just uncalled for.

And all the more awkward when you factor in the presence of, um, New Boyfriend.

And here I always thought Tyler wasn't the jealous type.

The first day of school kind of always brings about a bunch of mix-y feelings: It's great to be back with Paige and Madison, but whatever major ensemble Mad's put together for her big post-vacay debut is mildly intimidating—as is just about everything about Paige, when she's in Queen Bee-yotch mode. I try to remind myself that blank notebooks, shiny new MacBooks, and unchipped manicures are bright and fresh and cheerful things.

I was actually feeling fairly bright and fresh and cheerful as Tyler and I made our way from homeroom to first period.

(Never mind that I had English lit and he was all Chem-boy; we were doing that couple-y thing that is slightly less nauseating on the first day of school.) Tyler was digging my plaid skirt and riding boots, and we were holding hands and generally being gross as we rehashed the details from Maddie's dad's restaurant opening the night before. It had been quite a *soirée* . . . oh, LOL. But really, it had.

“Yo, I think I saw Paige and Dalton in the men's room—”

I was dying to know *what* Tyler had seen in the men's room (I mean, really, Paige—the *men's* room?), but alas, it was to remain a mystery, at least for the moment. The Ferragamo riding boots, those that had been, only seconds before, my biggest ally, betrayed me. They weren't really meant for riding. No traction.

I slipped in a muddy patch of grass and lurched forward.

I was falling—until, suddenly, I wasn't. Strong hands leveled my shoulders and I glanced up.

Jeremy.

I almost didn't recognize him, what with the whole DJ-AM mondo headphones hanging off of his head. Slightly askew now, 'cause of how I had gone careening into him so *gracefully* and all.

His eyes were flat, distanced . . . but endless. It was hard for me to look away.

See above re: provisions.

Jeremy. Back at Bradford. Even though I'd been forewarned, it still came as a shock to my system.

Wasn't he supposed to be, like, off taking pictures for *National Geographic* or something? Wasn't that the whole reason that we broke up?

He reached up and fumbled with his headphones so that they hung loosely around his neck. “Spence.”

“Hey.” I was the queen of witty banter. “You're back.” I was also a master of the obvious.

I found myself suddenly wishing that my riding boots had ruby-slipper powers. That's what I get for borrowing Madison's castaways rather than making use of Daddy's black Am Ex card. Full-priced boots would probably have come imbued with ruby-slipper powers or some other form of sartorial-based magical ability.

"Mom's sabbatical ended," he said. "So, yeah." He shrugged like he didn't know what else to do. "Back." He blinked, momentarily obscuring those eyes and giving me a flicker of relief.

"Welcome," I said, wanting to whack myself over the head with one of those soggy Ferragamos before I could outdo my own lame-osity. "Back."

"Don't you mean, *bienvenue*? And *besos*?"

I couldn't be certain, but it sounded a hell of a lot like Jeremy was mocking me. *Jeremy. Mocking me.*

Attitude, from the boy who'd given up Bradford for the Serengeti? The boy who'd traded Porsches for the chance to install potable water systems?

Then again, Jeremy had never exactly been the Porsche type.

Anyway, it was insane that he would be giving me grief. *Insane.* But I wasn't even thinking about that.

Nope. Instead, I was thinking about a certain carriage house, and a certain night. There had been flowers involved. Jeremy brought tulips. Orange. My favorite.

Also? He'd apparently read my blog since he'd been back.

"*Bienvenue*, dude," came a voice behind me.

Right. Tyler.

"Jeremy—" I said, stepping backward as steadily as I could, and draping one arm across Tyler's shoulders in what I hoped was a casual, yet semiterritorial manner. "You remember my boyfriend. Tyler. DuPont."

“DuPont.” Jeremy cocked an eyebrow. Tyler and co. weren’t exactly forgettable. Even after spending an entire year without cell phones or Internet, Jeremy knew that Tyler = BFD. “Wow.”

That was ironic, I thought. An ironic *wow*.

“I got to go,” Jeremy said, kind of abruptly. “But maybe we could meet up—not for coffee, I mean . . . unless—”

I shook my head. “I still don’t drink coffee.” I shuddered, we both laughed.

Tyler didn’t.

Jeremy rolled his eyes. “Peppermint tea, then. For old time’s sake.”

“Sure,” I said, as neutrally as I could manage, still clinging to Tyler in hardcore Girlfriend-Bot Mode.

He gave us a short, sharp wave and sauntered off. I couldn’t help but notice that his Chuck Taylors left no skid marks.

“What the hell was that?” Tyler asked, his voice like a thundercloud, snapping me out of my random observations of the natural world.

“What do you mean?” When in doubt, play dumb. Sad to say, it usually works.

“Are you still into that dude?”

I shook my head like I was trying to dislodge water from my ear. I opened my eyes as wide as they could possibly go without flying out of my skull.

“What? No *way*.” If I shook my head any harder it would dislocate from my neck. I linked my arm through Tyler’s and herded him toward the campus coffee cart. I don’t do the caffeine thing, but he sure does. A latte could probably soothe the savage beast.

“God, Tyler,” I babbled, as we made our way across the lawn. “Jeremy and I never had anything in common, anyway. And besides—he’s totally changed.

“How could I be hung up on *him*?”

location: under cover—literally. zzz.

mood: moody

soundtrack: none. though I can't help but wonder what was blasting through those ultramassive headphones.

COMMENTS (2):

Madison_Ave says: hmm . . .

FrontPaige says: it was the ladies' room, btw. i mean, do you think I'm some kind of raging skank?



All That Glitters

9/3, 1:23 p.m.
privacy setting: the vault

FRIENDS IN DEED

I was understandably relieved to hear of Paige's discerning tastes and sensibilities. Surely the comingled scents of antibacterial hand wash and Diptyque Tubereuse were the ideal backdrop for an R-rated interlude.

Anyway, by the next morning, I was over all of that.

What was I still possibly under? Emphasis on the *possibly*? My own interlude: the close encounter of the awkward-ex kind.

I couldn't decide: Was it weird that I couldn't get seeing Jeremy out of my head?

"*Jeremy?*" The wrinkle of Paige's nose said yes, yes it was. I was so glad that I had pulled her aside before lit class for a brief reality check. "Like, Jeremy *Brown?*"

As opposed to Jeremy Rhianna or Jeremy Ryan Phillipe, I guessed.

"That Jeremy," I confirmed, hoisting my field hockey duffle over my shoulder. I did a quick mental calculation: Would I have enough time to let Paige veer off on one of her Marie-Antoinette-esque tirades and still stash my equipment in the locker room before the first bell?

Probably not. But I knew well enough: There was no stopping Paige.

Still, I couldn't go down without some vague sort of last gasp. "Don't you think"—and here, I knew it was a long shot, but I literally couldn't stop myself. It was like that feeling that you get at the Barney's Co-op sample sale, where you suddenly find yourself trampling the pregnant and the elderly to claw at the last size 4 Sass and Bide Indian-print maxi dress with your OPI Russian Navy-manicured mitts—"that maybe there's something about him?" I took a stab at speaking frankly to Paige, thinking again of those headphones, those eyes, those Chucks . . . "Like, maybe he's changed?"

Or maybe it wasn't him. Maybe *I'd* changed, and that was why I needed Paige's approval.

"Like, no," she decided. "Not." She shrugged. "I never got what you saw in him, anyway. Jeremy is a total freak. No, wait—I wouldn't even give him that much credit. He's just lame." She made a face like her latte had curdled.

It didn't take too much effort for me to see Jeremy through Paige's coffee-colored peepers: The thrift store button-downs morphed from "eccentric" to "homeless," and his proclivity toward the Beat writers over *Maxim* was more "twee" than "sensitive." I could see Paige's point, no issue.

It was more that I was starting to feel like I might not share it anymore.

"Anyway," Paige went on, "it's not like you're some kind of desperate virgin spazz. I mean, you've got Tyler. *Any* girl at Bradford would tell you that he's the perfect package." She said this meaningfully, like that indeterminate army of "Anys" was poised at attention at the end of a random Bradford hallway, clad in La Perla and ready to pounce should I let my guard down even for a micro-moment.

Which, maybe it was.

“You’re just lucky I set him up with *you*.” She batted lushly curled eyelashes in my direction.

Lucky. Lucky me.

I curtsyed. It was perfect, of course. A Kelly knows from curtsying. “I am forever in your debt,” I joked.

She rolled her eyes. Not joking.

location: the Bradbrary

mood: meh

shoes: Tory Burch ballet flats in Kelly green quilted suede

FrontPaige: is thermally reconditioned. Like, her hair, that is.