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Opening extract from

Flora in Love

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The Film Diaries of Bluebell Gadsby

Scene One (Transcript)
Sunday Dinner

INTERIOR. EVENING.

The Gadsby family kitchen in the basement of the big house in Chatsworth Square is a mess. Bubbling pans crowd the hob. A collapsed chocolate cake balances on top of a fruit bowl. The sink is piled high with dirty dishes. Water drips, steady and unnoticed, on to the floor. FATHER lays the table, looking grumpy. FLORA sits at one end of the sofa under the window. She wears leopard-print leggings, an emerald-green sweater and the fedora she has refused to take off since she had her hair cropped and dyed peroxide blonde last week on her seventeenth birthday. She is

reading a play. At the other end of the sofa, nine-year-old JASMINE is her complete opposite – tiny, with tangled black hair falling down to her waist, a long black tunic over black jeans, and silver high tops. She is reading a poem called *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe.

MOTHER, covered in flour and melted chocolate, stands by the cooking range. She is flustered. She tastes the contents of a pan (tonight she is making goulash), burns her tongue and throws the spoon in the sink.

NOTE 1: For the past year, Sunday night dinner has been prepared by Zoran, the Gadsby family's au pair, who started out being able to cook nothing but sausages but by the time he moved out a month ago had become a seriously good cook. He is coming for dinner tonight for the first time since he left to become a full-time music teacher, and Mother is determined to make an impression.

FATHER

I should be writing my book. I should not be laying tables. Remind me again why we are doing this?

FLORA

(smirks, still reading her play)
Mum wants to show us she cooks just as well as Zoran.

MOTHER

I am simply throwing together a meal for an old friend.

FATHER

It doesn't look simple to me, it looks . . .

MOTHER

What?

FATHER

Excessive.

Mother glares at Father. For a moment, it looks like she is going to throw

the goulash at his head, but then a football sails in through the garden door (left open despite the cold night air because it is so hot in the kitchen), followed by TWIG.

The football crashes into the laid table and breaks several glasses.

NOTE 2: Since Twig turned eleven last summer, the family joke is that his legs have grown so fast he doesn't know what to do with them. And sure enough, no sooner does Twig burst into the room after the ball than he trips over his legs and ends up sprawled on the floor, leaving a trail of mud and wet leaves.

TWIG
(somewhat awestruck by the damage he has done)
I swear I didn't do that on purpose.

The telephone rings. Mother answers, looking increasingly dejected as she murmurs phrases like 'of course I understand' and 'please let us know if there is anything we can do to help'.

MOTHER

(hangs up the phone, looking like she wants to cry)

That was Zoran. Someone has had a heart attack. He's not coming.

FATHER

(surveying the ruined table)

After all that?

MOTHER

David, someone has had a *heart attack.*

She notices CAMERAMAN (Blue) for the first time.

MOTHER

Blue, what are you doing with that camera?

CAMERAMAN

I'm starting up my diary again.

MOTHER

Turn it off, *now.*

I have noticed that people only write in diaries when there's something wrong, write properly I mean. Over the past few months I've only used up about half a notebook, and most of those entries are all 'I can't believe how long it's been since I last wrote' or 'Oh dear I feel guilty because the holidays are over and I haven't once opened this notebook,' but today I have got right back into it because Mum and Dad are fighting again. Last year, when Zoran came to live with us as our au pair, we were falling apart because my twin sister Iris had died three years before and we still missed her so much, but things started to get better after he arrived. In fact, they improved so much that when he tried to resign last Christmas, we wouldn't let him go. Even after Mum and Dad decided to leave their old jobs so they could be at home more (Dad is a full-time writer and Mum works for a smaller cosmetics company that doesn't make her travel), he stayed with us right up until the summer, when he finally completed his PhD in Medieval History and told us it was time for him to move on.

'I cannot be a nanny for ever,' he explained when we asked him why. He has been giving music lessons

all year, and now he wants to be a full-time music teacher.

At first, after Mum and Dad resigned, they made a real effort, not just with us but with each other. They stopped fighting and started to slope off for romantic weekends in the country instead. Apparently they had a lot of catching up to do, and it just wasn't possible to be romantic with four children in the house. Flora said it was a scandal. She said that at her age she was the one who was supposed to be skulking off to canoodle in secret, and that they were making a complete spectacle of themselves, but they were happy, so we didn't mind. And then, round about when Zoran left, Mum and Dad's canoodling stopped. This morning they had a huge fight, and they have barely spoken to each other all day. Flora says we should Resign Ourselves to the Inevitable. We were all quite ready for the parents to divorce last Christmas, and apparently the intervening months have been no more than a Temporary Reprieve.

I don't know if Zoran leaving and Mum and Dad quarrelling are related. I just know that even though he wasn't always very good at looking after us, things were better at home when he was still around.

The reason Zoran didn't come for dinner is that

the grandfather of one of his students has had a stroke. The difference between a heart attack and a stroke, Dad says, is that a heart attack is what happens when blood stops flowing to the heart, and a stroke is what happens when blood stops flowing to the brain.

'So it's a brain attack,' Twig said, and Dad said yes, he supposed it was.

'But why does that mean Zoran couldn't come for dinner?' Jas frowned.

'Because he was at the boy's house giving a music lesson when it happened. The boy lives with his grandfather and has no other family. Zoran offered to look after him.' Mum stared at the goulash, the green beans, the potato gratin, the red cabbage with apples and raisins, the chocolate cake and the custard, and sighed.

'Those poor people,' she said.

'Is the grandfather going to die?' Jas is fascinated by death. 'Will the boy be an orphan?'

'I'm sure it won't come to that,' Mum said. 'Please stop asking questions.'

'I still don't get why they couldn't come for dinner,' Twig said.

Flora said, 'Oh, what, Zoran should have been like, I know your only relative just nearly died but

why don't you come and have dinner with a group of total strangers?'

'We're not strangers,' Twig said.

'I can't imagine only having one relative,' I said. 'That's so sad.'

As usual, nobody listened to me except for Mum, who gave me a little smile. Zoran says every family has a child who is less loud than the others, and sometimes I feel like I'm invisible. Maybe it's because unlike Flora and Jas, I don't have statement hair and clothes. My hair is brown and normal, my clothes never seem to go together and at fourteen I'm still wearing the little round glasses I got when I was twelve, but I don't really care about any of that. I just wish once in a while someone would pay attention when I finally get a word in edgeways.

'But why is Zoran looking after him?' Jas ploughed on. 'I thought he didn't want to be a nanny any more. If he was still living with us, would that mean the boy with the grandfather would come and live here too? Couldn't they come and live here anyway?'

'STOP ASKING QUESTIONS!' said Dad.

'She's only asking because she wants to know,' said Mum.

'You just told her exactly the same thing.'

'That was different.'

'No it wasn't.'

'Yes it was.'

'Sometimes,' Jas said, 'I wish *I* were an orphan.'

'That is a terrible thing to say,' Flora scolded, but then she added that sometimes she did too, and everybody sulked for the rest of the evening.

Monday 4 November (the first day of half-term)

Jake has asked me to go out with him. He left for Australia today, to go to his cousin's wedding. The holidays are only a week long, but because Australia is so far away and it is A Genuine Family Reason as well as a Highly Educational Trip, God (aka Mr Kelly the headmaster) has given Special Dispensation for him to stay away for a month. On Friday Tom, who along with Colin is still Jake's best friend for reasons I sometimes find hard to understand, was all WHAHAY, DUDE, NO SCHOOL FOR A MONTH AND THINK OF ALL THOSE HOT SURF CHICKS but Jake went all serious and then this morning he said could I meet him at the Home Sweet Home cafe before he went to the airport and he asked me.