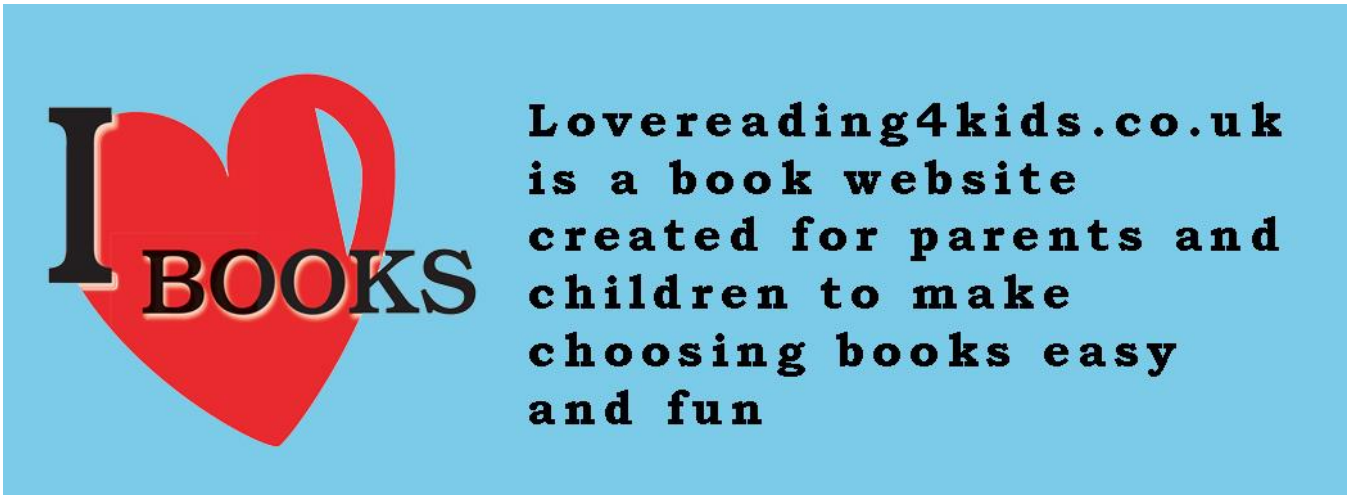


Opening extract from

Time for Jas: The Diaries of Bluebell Gadsby

Written by

Natasha Farrant

Published by

Faber & Faber

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in 2016
by Faber & Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House,
74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Typeset by MRules

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

All rights reserved
© Natasha Farrant, 2016

The right of Natasha Farrant to be identified as
author of this work has been asserted in accordance with
Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent,
resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's
prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in
which it is published and without a similar condition including
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–32233–6



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

The Film Diaries of Bluebell Gadsby

Scene One
The Appearance of a Zebra

Daytime, Chatsworth Square (West London home of the Gadsby family, newly returned from their summer holiday in Devon).

Three children are playing a ball game in the street. They are TWIG GADSBY (twelve, still brown from his holidays, wearing mismatched trainers because he forgot one each of two pairs at his grandmother's in Devon), DODI CARTWRIGHT (fourteen, but impeccable as ever in white shorts and a grey sequinned tank top) and JASMINE GADSBY (ten, barefoot because her flip flops keep falling off, tangled hair because she never brushes

it, torn too-small dress because it's her favourite).

The game consists of throwing a ball at each other as hard as possible. With the exception of the Gadsby family's scruffy-looking house, this is a very smart neighbourhood, and not the sort in which children run about throwing things and shouting.

Flowers have been trampled. Injuries sustained. A plant pot has been broken.

TWIG

(jumps up from behind a BMW convertible and hurls the ball at Dodi)

Take that, rat!

DODI

(dives behind a bank of tall purple flowers in Mrs Henderson's front garden, taking off one of their heads as she goes)

Not this time, pig!

JASMINE

(jumps up and down, screaming)

Throw it to me! Throw it to me!

Dodi is a terrible thrower, especially when she is laughing. The ball doesn't simply miss Jasmine. It sails from Dodi's hands in the opposite direction, straight towards where CAMERAMAN (BLUEBELL, fourteen, denim cut-offs, falling apart sneakers, shoulder-length plaits and glasses) sits filming the game on the roof of the Gadsby family's battered people carrier. Cameraman ducks. The ball misses her, bounces on the car bonnet and rolls into the gutter.

Picture jumps about as Cameraman slides off car roof and crouches on edge of pavement to retrieve the ball. She utters exclamation of surprise.

TWIG

Blue, the ball!

Blue ignores him and resumes filming. There is the tarmac road, the contrasting stone edging of the gutter. Black rubber tires, discarded litter and . . .

CAMERAMAN

A *zebra*?

The car was parked over a drain cover, the rectangular kind with a grid for rainwater to run into. The dull, brown kind you would never normally notice, except that today someone had used chalks to colour the grid in black and white zebra stripes, with a head and four legs, a stripy mane and tail AND A BLUEBELL IN ITS MOUTH.

A *bluebell*.

Just to be clear: a bluebell *like my name*.

I stared at the zebra/drain. It stared back. The others shouted for the ball. I nearly told them to come and look, but something stopped me.

It was so … weird. And pretty. And somehow – because of the bluebell – private.

'Blue, the *ball!*' Twig shouted from across the street, and then Mrs Henderson came out of her house shouting about her flowers and what did we think we were doing?

The real reason for the ball game is that Twig is starting secondary school next week, and he's worried he's going to be rubbish at sport. Twig is easily the cleverest person in our family. He knows everything there is to know about things like science and natural history, but he is not very coordinated physically, and

he thinks that now that he is going to a big school everyone will laugh at him if he can't even catch a ball. I have tried to explain it doesn't matter, and that I have been at Clarendon Free for years without being good at sports, but he says it's different for boys and he doesn't want people to think he's a nerd and please could we just practise as much as possible. I did think of telling Mrs Henderson, who is quite a nice person when she's not cross, but by now a group of people had gathered nearby.

There was a dark-haired boy about my age and a little round man I had never seen before, both in spotless white and clutching tennis rackets, and Mrs Doriot-Buffet, the big American lady who moved in at the beginning of summer, dressed in a turquoise velvet tracksuit and trying to stop her fat black and tan miniature dachshund getting tangled up in its lead as it went round and round in circles.

'I think it's trying to do a poo,' Jas remarked loudly.

The boy stifled a laugh. The little round man smacked him on the arm. Mrs Doriot-Buffet flushed and said how sorry she was for poor Mrs Henderson's hydrangeas. The little round man said *his* son would *never* behave like that. The boy's hair flopped over his face as he stared at the pavement.

'We're extremely sorry,' I started to say, but then Flora burst out of our house with a naked Pumpkin on her hip and her dress covered in mashed food, yelling at us to come indoors THIS MINUTE for lunch.

Mrs Doriot-Buffet stared at her, horrified.

'She probably thinks Pumpkin is Flora's baby,' Dodi grinned before she left us.

'Don't leave us alone with her,' I begged, but Dodi said there was no way she was staying if Flora was cooking.

The situation at home is this: Mum's maternity leave is over, but as usual she has left it too late to get organised and find a nanny. Flora doesn't leave for drama school for a while, so she is in charge of looking after Pumpkin and, supposedly, us. This means she thinks she can shout at us as much as she wants, and also feed us the same mashed-up baby food Pumpkin eats now he doesn't just drink milk.

We have all begged our ex-nanny Zoran to look after us instead, but he is leaving London soon for Devon with his glamorous girlfriend Gloria. She is in the middle of selling her riding school under the motorway not far from here, after which she will move all her ponies to Grandma's house to create the

Horsehill School of Riding, while Zoran composes songs on Grandma's piano and gives music lessons and looks after Grandma because she is getting too old to live in a big house all by herself. Dad can't help because he is staying in Devon until Zoran and Gloria move, and also because he is hopeless, and the one time he looked after Pumpkin all day on his own he left him in the park because he was so busy thinking about the book he is writing.

'What vegetable is it today?' Twig asked, as Flora served up dollops of slop.

'Broccoli.'

'It's *brown*.'

Flora said that was because she added Nutella to make it sweeter, and he should stop complaining or she'd tell Mum about us trampling Mrs Henderson's garden. Jas and Twig made gagging noises all through lunch. I tried to be polite, but gave up after about three spoonfuls.

'I saw this amazing drawing of a zebra,' I said. Now that I'd got over the surprise, I wanted to ask them to come out and look at the drawing. 'It was the weirdest thing. Someone had drawn it on a drain, and it had . . .'

I wasn't so sure any more if the flower *was* a bluebell, and I wanted them to tell me if *they*

thought it was, and if it meant anything or was it just coincidence that someone had drawn a picture of a flower that was *my* name under *our* car.

Then Pumpkin threw his bowl on the floor, and Jas laughed so hard she spat water all over the table. Flora shouted, 'Zebras! I'm already surrounded by animals!'

It was hopeless trying to get their attention. Instead, I took my camera out to the garden and looked at it again and again.

The flower in the zebra's mouth has a green stalk and a cluster of blue, bell-like petals. It is most definitely a bluebell.

Thursday 2 September

Zoran called yesterday to say he had a friend who wouldn't mind being our nanny, and he brought her this afternoon to meet us. Her name is Pixie O'Dare, she has just arrived in London from Ireland to make money to pay to go travelling, and she is possibly the prettiest person I have ever seen. She is tiny, with wrists as small as Jas's, an upturned nose with a dusting of freckles, a mouth like a strawberry, green eyes with thick black lashes and a page-boy cut

with a bleached blonde crown graduating through shades of pink to bright bubble-gum at the tips. She was dressed in a navy boiler suit, but her toe and fingernails were painted with glitter, and on her back she was wearing . . . wings.

Actual, glittery wings.

Zoran started to introduce us. Pumpkin, who hates not being the centre of attention, did that thing where he goes from giggling to screaming in about two seconds. Pixie held out her arms. Flora handed him over. Pumpkin instantly stopped crying, which *was* impressive, because the fastest anyone has ever got him to stop screaming is one minute and seventeen seconds, when Jas held him right up in a horse's face in Devon and he was so astonished he practically stopped breathing. I thought maybe Jas would be jealous, but she just frowned like she was a bit puzzled, and asked Pixie why she was wearing wings.

Pixie said, because you should always wear clothes that make you happy. She waggled her shoulders. The wings fluttered, and Jas laughed.

'You see?' Pixie said.

Then Flora asked, why was she wearing a boiler suit. Pixie said they were the best thing for looking after babies, and to just look at Flora's dress.

'What's wrong with my dress?' Flora asked.

'You'll never get that mash out. This boiler suit, now. This is heavy duty.'

Flora wrinkled her nose, because she doesn't like other people being better at clothes than she is. She actually used to have pink hair too, but it didn't look as good as Pixie's, and I could tell she was annoyed about the wings as well as the boiler suit, because it's true that even though Pixie did look a bit mad, the whole combination somehow worked.

Jas was so impressed she made up a poem on the spot – *Pixie O'Dare, so pink and fair, I love the way she does her hair, Her skills with babies can't compare, To anybody's in the square*. Pixie said what a lovely poem and she couldn't wait to hear more of Jas's work. Flora barged in and said *she* was going to drama school, and then she explained all about how exclusive the Foulkes-Watson School for the Performing Arts is, and how it's in a big country house in Scotland, and how she was in a film last summer.

'A real film,' Flora said. 'Not like the ones Blue makes.'

'My films *are* real!' I protested, but then Mum came home and no-one could get a word in edgeways, between Pumpkin squealing and Jas reciting her

Pixie poem and Twig practising throwing and catching and Flora announcing loudly that she was going to go to the hairdresser tomorrow and maybe get her hair dyed ORANGE.

Jas spent the evening throwing out all the clothes she says don't make her happy. Twig and I watched leggings and jumpers pile up on the floor.

'I like that,' I said, pointing at a brown wool cardigan.

'Dull!' Jas cried, with her head in her wardrobe. 'You can have it if you want.'

'Thanks,' I said, but she didn't get the sarcasm.

'What do *you* think of Pixie?' Twig asked.

'Odd,' I said. 'But good with Pumpkin. What do you think?'

'I think she's fine, but I don't want her coming anywhere near my school.'

Friday 3 September

Flora did go to the hairdresser this morning (she has had a perm, and her hair is so curly it sticks out almost horizontally all around her head so that she looks like a sheep). I looked after Pumpkin while she was gone. Dodi came round and we lay in the garden