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Opening extract from

Carbon Diaries 2015

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Published by

Hodder

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January

Thurs, Jan 1st

Exhausted. The whole family looks like death after an all-day meeting. The last time we were all in one place together for more than 3 hours was when my sister, Kim, locked us in a holiday cottage in France for the whole of Millennium night by mistake. Happy times. Today she locked just herself in her bedroom and sulked until Dad got her to come out. Typical. Mum is Being Very Positive – ranting about when she did voluntary work in the 80s on a kibbutz in Israel, knitting lentil ponchos and *it being the best days of her life*.

Dad muttered that we shouldn't just focus on it being difficult, but think up a New Year's wish list. He typed our answers into his laptop. Ever since he got made Head of Travel and Tourism at Greenham College he zaps everything into Excel and files it as evidence. Mum says The System's got him by the Balls.

Brown Family New Year's Luxury Item List. 01/01/15

Nick Brown	Julia Brown	Laura Brown	Kim Brown
One hour of quiet time in study per evening	The car (Saab hydro-hybrid 9-50 Convertible)	Keep the dirty angels up and running	Her life back
Archer's Omnibus on Sundays	Shiseido face and body range	24/7 access to e-pod	
	Inner Growth	Ravi Datta to notice me (did not write this down)	

She just rolled her eyes when she saw Dad's list. She said, 'God, Nick, I didn't know we were so *polarised*.'

Fri, Jan 2nd

My parents are in deep denial; they've spent the day on the sofa, staring blindly at the TV like amoebas. So far they've back-to-back watched *Dumbo*, *Mary Poppins* and *Judy Garland: a Tribute in Song*.

I saw Kim for a total of 5.2 seconds when I answered the front door to a pizza deliveryman. She stormed out of her room and snatched the pizza box off me with dead eyes before marching back into her room again. She's so using my parents' death state to get her boyfriend, Paul, round and blaze in her room. I caught a real blast when she opened her door.

I wanted to watch the news and check out the

countdown to rationing, but fat chance of that in this house of drugs and musicals, so I sneaked out next door but one to Kieran's. When I got there he was unblocking his kitchen sink – which is kind of funny because Kieran is a single, gay hairdresser in his 30s and if anyone should be wiped out on the sofa and drooling over musicals after an all-nighter it should be him, really. But that's why I love him. He's actually not predictable and ground down to dust, the *total opposite* of most adults. I reckon if he can get away with it then maybe I can too, when my time comes.

'Hold this,' he groaned, handing me a bit of sink before ducking his head under again and poking upward viciously with a coat hanger. The plumbing let out a totally brutal gurgle and evil gunk exploded out of the plughole.

Kieran screamed, 'Oh Jesus!' and sprang backward, shards of meat and grease and carrots streaming down his face. Gross.

He dived under the power shower and stayed there for one long time, so I flicked on Channel 4 News. They've got this big countdown clock in the studio with massive Day-Glo carbon symbols instead of numbers on its face. It was kind of like kid's TV cept it's so real. Messed up.

Anyway, today's symbol was about food miles. The presenter stood in front of a split video screen and waved

his arm towards the left-side screen, where there was a South African farmer holding out a ripe mango. On the other side there was a farmer in Kent holding a wrinkled apple. Basically a 12,000-air-mile mango versus a 40-minutes-in-the-back-of-a-dirty-old-truck apple. The carbon maths is a no-brainer, but life is definitely going to be a lot less glamorous.

This 60% reduction is way over the top. We were supposed to get there by 2030, but after the Great Storm everything changed and it all became more hectic. Even so, why is the UK going first? I know we were hit the hardest in the storm – that was one messed-up time; houses literally ripped out of the ground, thousands of people homeless over the whole winter, no petrol for a month. I guess something really happened to people then. It was like everyone went *That's enough. Stop now*. Europe's going to follow – I mean, they've got to in the end – but right now it's like they're happy for someone else to do it first. So looks like we're the stupid guinea-pig freaks, giving up everything while the rest sit back and watch.

11 p.m. In bed now. *Jeeesus*, Kieran's got himself in a real state over rationing.

'I'm all washed up. Finished,' he kept moaning. 'It's the

hunter-gatherer, macho, sink-unblocker's world now. What'll become of a little skinny hairdresser guy like me?'

Kieran goes to the gym about six times a week, so I told him he had gorgeous pecs, which usually sorts him out.

'Yeah, yeah, but what's the use when there'll be no clubs, no weekenders in Ibiza, no chilled Laurent-Perrier, no Versace? A male hairdresser can't be taken seriously without a lifestyle!'

'Like you do any of that stuff, anyway,' I snorted. 'You're always moaning about those scene queens.'

'I know, I know – but they're taking my right to choose away!'

I checked he wasn't being ironic, but his mouth was all drawn down like a little boy.

When I got home, my parents were asleep in front of the TV screen, every single light in the house was blazing and Kim was in the bath with the stereo and her bedroom HD on. I don't know what's gonna happen to this family once rationing really kicks in.

Sat, Jan 3rd

Dad sat us all down again tonight and took us thru a disgusting government online form to work out what our family CO allowance actually is. It's heavy. Basically we've got a carbon allowance of 200 Carbon Points per month

to spend on travel, heat and food. All other stuff like clothes and technology and books have already got the Carbon Points built into the price, so say you wanna buy a PC but it's been shipped over from China and built using dirty fossil fuel then you're gonna pay a lot more for it in Euros – cos you're paying for all the energy that's gone into making it.

At first they set up a free trading system so that if you were rich you could just buy up carbon in cash and live how you wanted – but after the riots last September the Gov backed down and changed the rules so that no one's allowed to buy more than 50 extra points a month.

And the worst thing is, on top of all this, me and Kim have to give up loads of our points for the family energy allowance, which leaves us some pathetic amount for travel, college, going out . . . The car's gonna be cut way back, all of us get access to the PC, TV, HD, stereo for only 2 hours a day, heating is down to 16°C in the living room and 1 hour a day for the rest of the house, showers max 5 minutes, baths only at weekend. We've got to choose – hairdryer, toaster, microwave, smartphone, de-ioniser (Mum), kettle, lights, PDA, e-pod, fridge or freezer and on and on. Flights are a real no-no and shopping, travelling and going out not much better. It's all kind of a *choice*.

I sat there and thought about my band, the *dirty angels*.

We've just got back together after a break for *musical differences* after Claire got heavily into hardcore Straight Edge. She was so militant. You couldn't even unwrap a Snickers around her without a lecture on skinny cocoa-bean farmers. Anyway, she blew it by getting back with her snotty boyfriend *and* eating a bacon sandwich – all on the same day – and so we're together again and sounding *sooooo* good right now. It's my dream.

And all the time everyone was saying stuff like, *Well, I'm not selling the car, I worked hard for it*, and, *I just want to go on my gap year and get away from your selfish messed-up generation*, and *I insist that one of the daily TV-hours is spent watching a current affairs programme*.

Mon, Jan 5th

Carbon cards came today . . .



They've got these little blocks down one side going from green to red and as you use up your year's ration they fade away one by one till you're down to the last red and then you're all alone, sobbing in the dark. Kim won't unwrap her card, she says if she touches it then that's all her youth gone. I felt pretty shaky unwrapping mine, not that I really have a youth in my family. My sister's got it.

Tues, Jan 6th

The whole of London exploded tonight. It was all pretty normal round ours till about 9. Friends of my parents had come for supper. They were talking all the usual shite, then Marcia Hamilton, head of hardback non-fiction at Penguin, suddenly crawled under the table and started pawing at my dad's leg, like a little lost poodle, *yelping:* 'I can't cope!' Dad clutched his knife and fork really tight and tried to pretend it wasn't happening. Then Mum slammed her hand on the table and went: 'Damn right – let it out, Marcia!' before pouring half a bottle of wine down her throat. She turned to Phil Hamilton and said, 'Will you dance with me to the passing of an era?' *Phil Hamilton*, who is 5 foot 5, bald, with a woman's bottom and acne at 47 years of age!

I thought I was going to puke. I got myself out on the street – and breathed deep. Please God, let me die

before their genes kick-start in me.

Anyway, once I was there, a sudden movement caught my eye – and I turned to see Ravi Datta leaning against his front door. His family moved in next door a few months ago, he goes to the same college as me and is in my Design Tech class. And he is fully gorgeous. He was silhouetted by a street-lamp, smoking a totally illegal cigarette and staring up at the rockets the Leaders were setting off over the estate. The lamp kept flickering on and off, lighting up his face and jet-black hair. And the best thing of all is he doesn't *know* he's fit. And the worst thing of all is he makes me so nervous and I say stuuupid things when I'm around him like pointing at his smoke and saying, 'That's gonna kill you.' He turned and grinned: 'So?' before taking in a last vicious pull and flicking the butt into the sky in a shower of sparks. Then he went back inside the house. He hardly ever says anything. It makes me mad when gorgeous people won't talk because boring people never shut up.

I hung out for a while, just looking up at the stars, and then suddenly a rocket fizzed right over me and smashed into Kieran's upstairs-flat window. Kieran stormed out on to his balcony and started screaming at the estate about them all being homophobic pigs and hunter-gatherers. Then the whole Leader family came out on to the estate

balconies and started wolf-whistling him.

There are about a hundred Leaders, but never at the same time because they're always in and out of prison or young offenders. The top dog Leader is Tracey because she's too smart to get put inside. Tracey Leader has got arms like tree trunks. She's got a tweety bird tattoo on her collar bone and is dead scary. When she laughs she throws her head back and her gold tooth *glistens* but her brother, Karl Leader, is totally fit. I don't know how because the rest of the Leaders look like a horror film. He has got Bambi eyelashes and a chiselled jawbone.

Anyway it could have been really bad for Kieran, but Tracey was in a gold-tooth mood and sent over her cousin, Desiree Leader, with a bottle of Cava to say sorry. And so me and Kieran wandered the streets, all the way up to Blackheath, swigging from the bottle. Bringing in the new era in style. The roads were full of crazy people and there was smoke and explosions and screaming and singing and fights and madness everywhere.

I'm excited.

Weds, Jan 7th

Midnight. This is it. Let loose da dogs o' war!

Thurs, Jan 8th

Rationing.

Back to college, and I got in late cos I had to take Mum to her bus stop. Her eyes filled up with tears as we walked past the Saab. She whispered, 'It's not for ever,' and stroked the bonnet. I pretended not to see – it's better than her being positive.

We missed the first bus cos her high heels were rubbing, so we had to wait 15 minutes in the drizzle till the next one. When it finally came I leapt on, swiped my card and was scooting upstairs, only to see Mum behind me going thru her purse, bag and pockets, throwing fluff and Conran receipts everywhere. She looked up at me.

'Laura, darling, I can't find my card. Can you lend me some . . .'

The driver shook his head. 'No carbon card, no ride, love.'

'But, please . . .'

A woman out in the rain shouted: 'Get off, yer stoopid cow! You're holding us up.'

And then Mum started to cry. I went back down and walked her off the bus. 'We'll have to go home and get your card, Mum.'

'Found it! In the lining! Bastards!' Mum shook the green plastic at the bus, now rumbling off into the traffic.

'Oh, I shouldn't get so upset. Sweetie, let's pop into Alfredo's for a cup of tea.'

'I'm so sorry, Laura.' Mum stirred her dodgy brown tea. 'I know I should be strong, but I feel so responsible for my generation – we're the ones who've messed it all up for you.' She tapped my hand. 'Don't bite your nails, sweetie. I mean, what's going to become of you young things? Woodstock, freedom, women's rights, the Magic Bus . . . that's what it was all about – but you'll never know . . . Don't forget, I'm your mother and I'm always here if you need to talk.'

I kept quiet. I once worked out that if Mum had actually been to Woodstock, she'd be about 70 by now, but there's no point saying anything.

'Ah well, that's better!' She drained her mug. 'Isn't this fun, a greasy spoon? I haven't been in one of these since I was supporting the miners in Bradford in the eighties.'

I stood up and put my jacket on. I will blow my brains out if I'm forced to hear this story one more time.

When I finally got to college there was a huge queue at the entrance cos everyone had to swipe their CO cards at the turnstile and the swipe machine kept breaking down and setting off the alarm. I don't know what we were swiping for anyway – the building was freezing cold.

'Welcome to the future,' muttered Adisa. 'They're