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Opening extract from

Flora & Ulysses
The Illuminated Adventures

Written by

Kate DiCamillo

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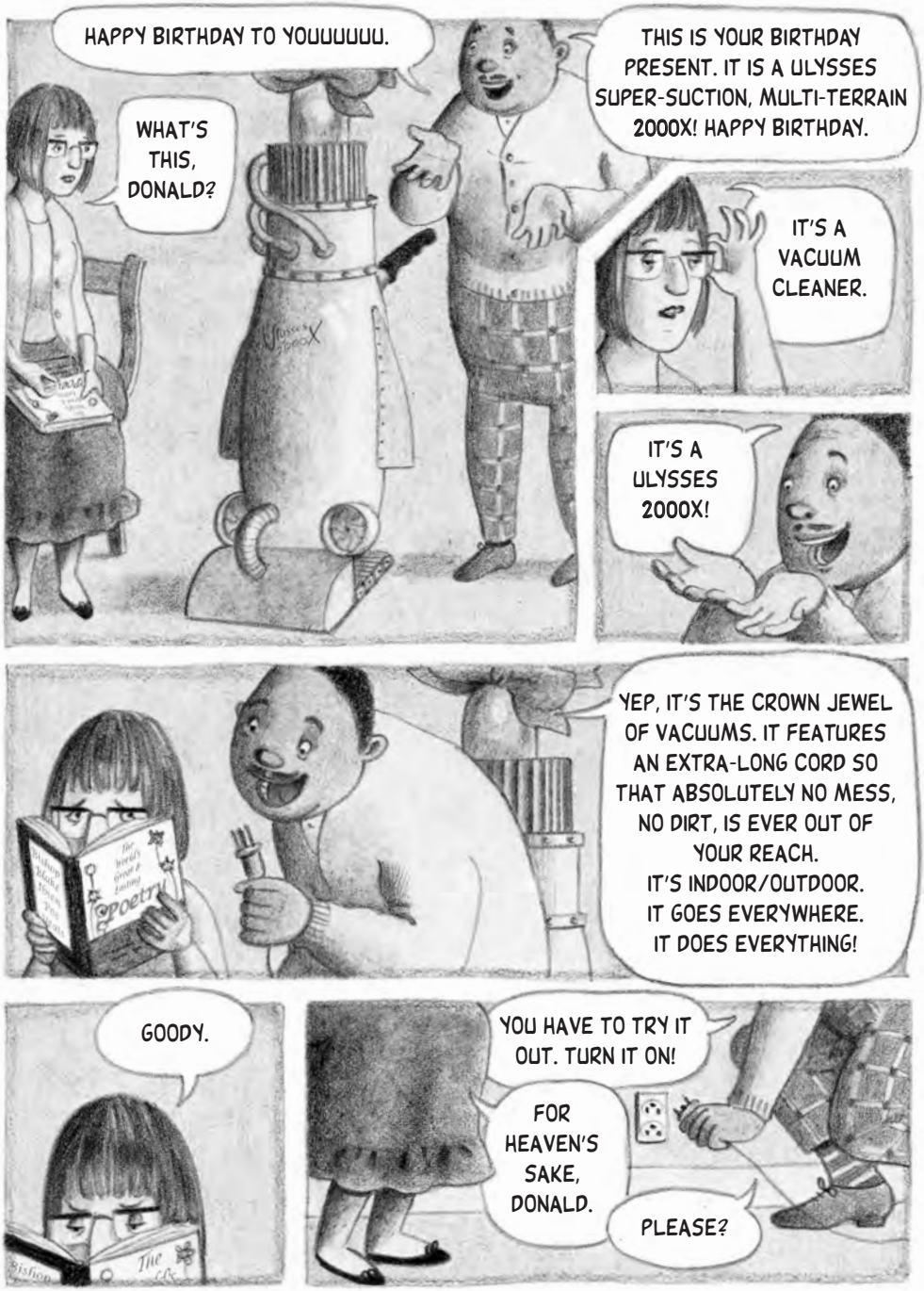
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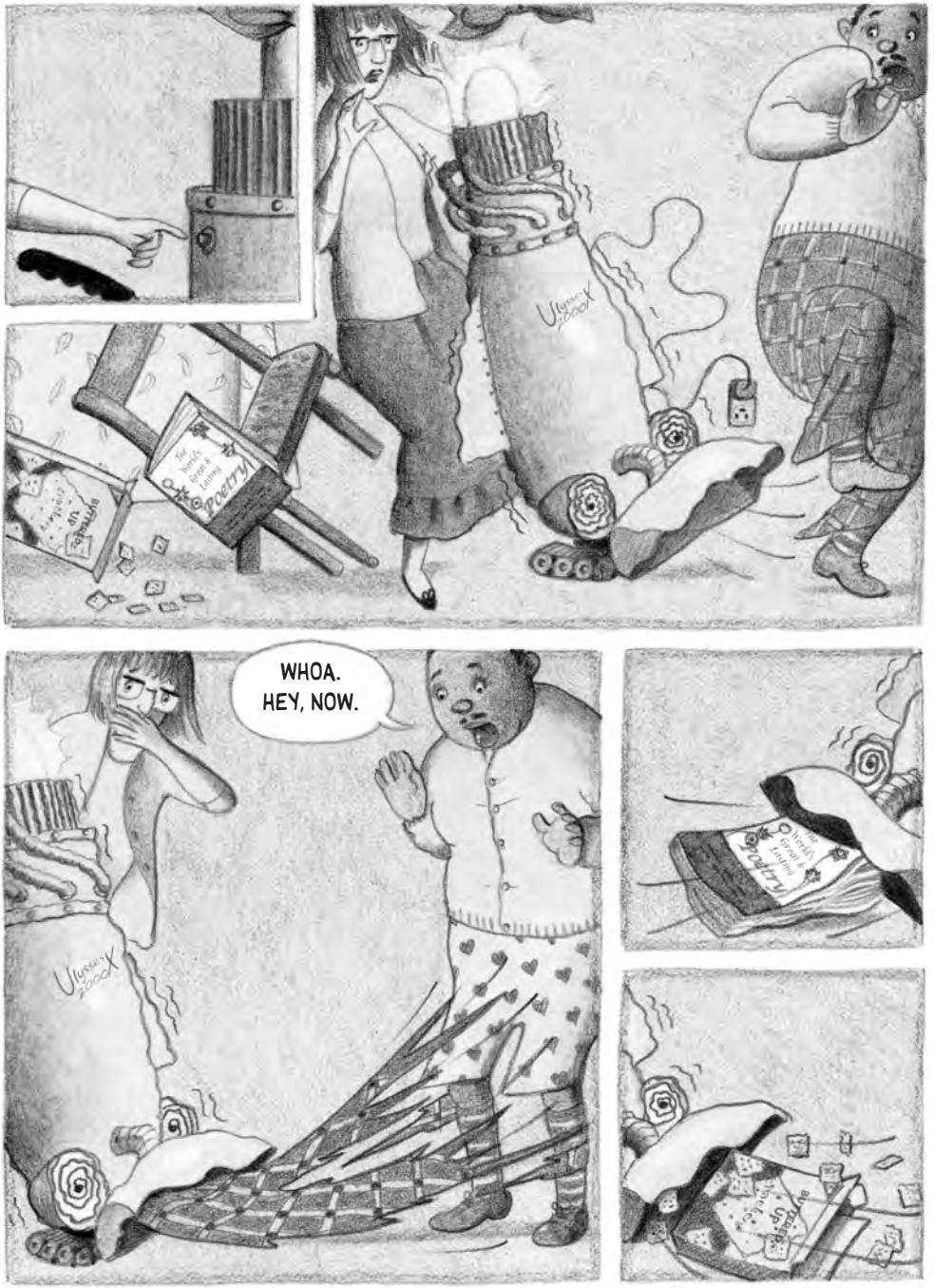
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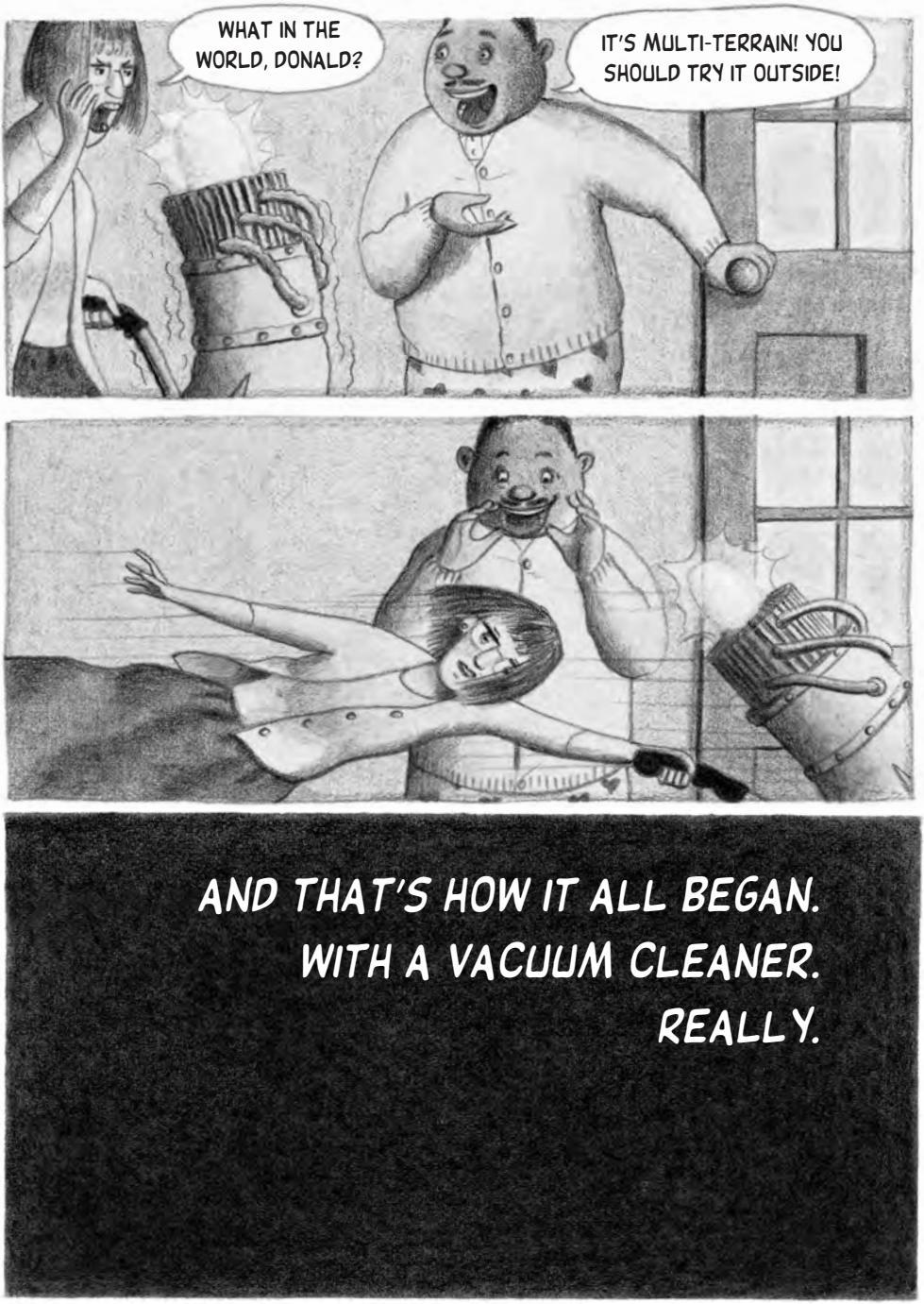
IN THE TICKHAM KITCHEN, LATE ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON . . .






HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOUUUUUU.
WHAT'S THIS, DONALD?
THIS IS YOUR BIRTHDAY PRESENT. IT IS A ULYSSES SUPER-SUCTION, MULTI-TERRAIN 2000X! HAPPY BIRTHDAY.
IT'S A VACUUM CLEANER.
IT'S A ULYSSES 2000X!
YEP, IT'S THE CROWN JEWEL OF VACUUMS. IT FEATURES AN EXTRA-LONG CORD SO THAT ABSOLUTELY NO MESS, NO DIRT, IS EVER OUT OF YOUR REACH.
IT'S INDOOR/OUTDOOR.
IT GOES EVERYWHERE.
IT DOES EVERYTHING!
GOODY.
YOU HAVE TO TRY IT OUT. TURN IT ON!
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, DONALD.
PLEASE?


for
Words
Great &
Lasting
Poetry!
WHOA.
HEY, NOW.


WHAT IN THE WORLD, DONALD?
IT'S MULTI-TERRAIN! YOU SHOULD TRY IT OUTSIDE!
AND THAT'S HOW IT ALL BEGAN. WITH A VACUUM CLEANER. REALLY.

CHAPTER ONE
A Natural-Born Cynic

Flora Belle Buckman was in her room at her desk. She was very busy. She was doing two things at once. She was ignoring her mother, and she was also reading a comic book entitled *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!*

"Flora," her mother shouted, "what are you doing up there?"

"I'm reading!" Flora shouted back.

"Remember the contract!" her mother shouted. "Do not forget the contract!"

At the beginning of summer, in a moment of weakness, Flora had made the mistake of signing a contract that said she would "work to turn her face away from the idiotic high jinks of comics and toward the bright light of true literature."

Those were the exact words of the contract. They were her mother's words.

Flora's mother was a writer. She was divorced, and she wrote romance novels.

Talk about idiotic high jinks.

Flora hated romance novels.

In fact, she hated romance.

"I hate romance," said Flora out loud to herself. She liked the way the words sounded. She imagined them floating above her in a comic-strip bubble; it was a comforting thing to have words

I HATE ROMANCE.

hanging over her head. Especially negative words about romance.



Flora's mother had often accused Flora of being a "natural-born cynic."

Flora suspected that this was true.

SHE WAS A NATURAL-BORN CYNIC WHO LIVED IN DEFIANCE OF CONTRACTS!

Yep, thought Flora, *that's me.* She bent her head and went back to reading about the amazing Incandesto.

She was interrupted a few minutes later by a very loud noise.

It sounded as if a jet plane had landed in the Tickhams' backyard.

"What the heck?" said Flora. She got up from her desk and looked out the window and saw Mrs. Tickham running around the backyard with a shiny, oversize vacuum cleaner.

It looked like she was vacuuming the yard.

That can't be, thought Flora. *Who vacuums their yard?*

Actually, it didn't look like Mrs. Tickham knew *what* she was doing.

It was more like the vacuum cleaner was in charge. And the vacuum cleaner seemed to be out of its mind. Or its engine. Or something.

"A few bolts shy of a load," said Flora out loud.

And then she saw that Mrs. Tickham and the vacuum cleaner were headed directly for a squirrel.

"Hey, now," said Flora.

She banged on the window.

"Watch out!" she shouted. "You're going to vacuum up that squirrel!"

She said the words, and then she had a strange moment of seeing them, hanging there over her head.

"YOU'RE GOING TO VACUUM UP THAT SQUIRREL!"

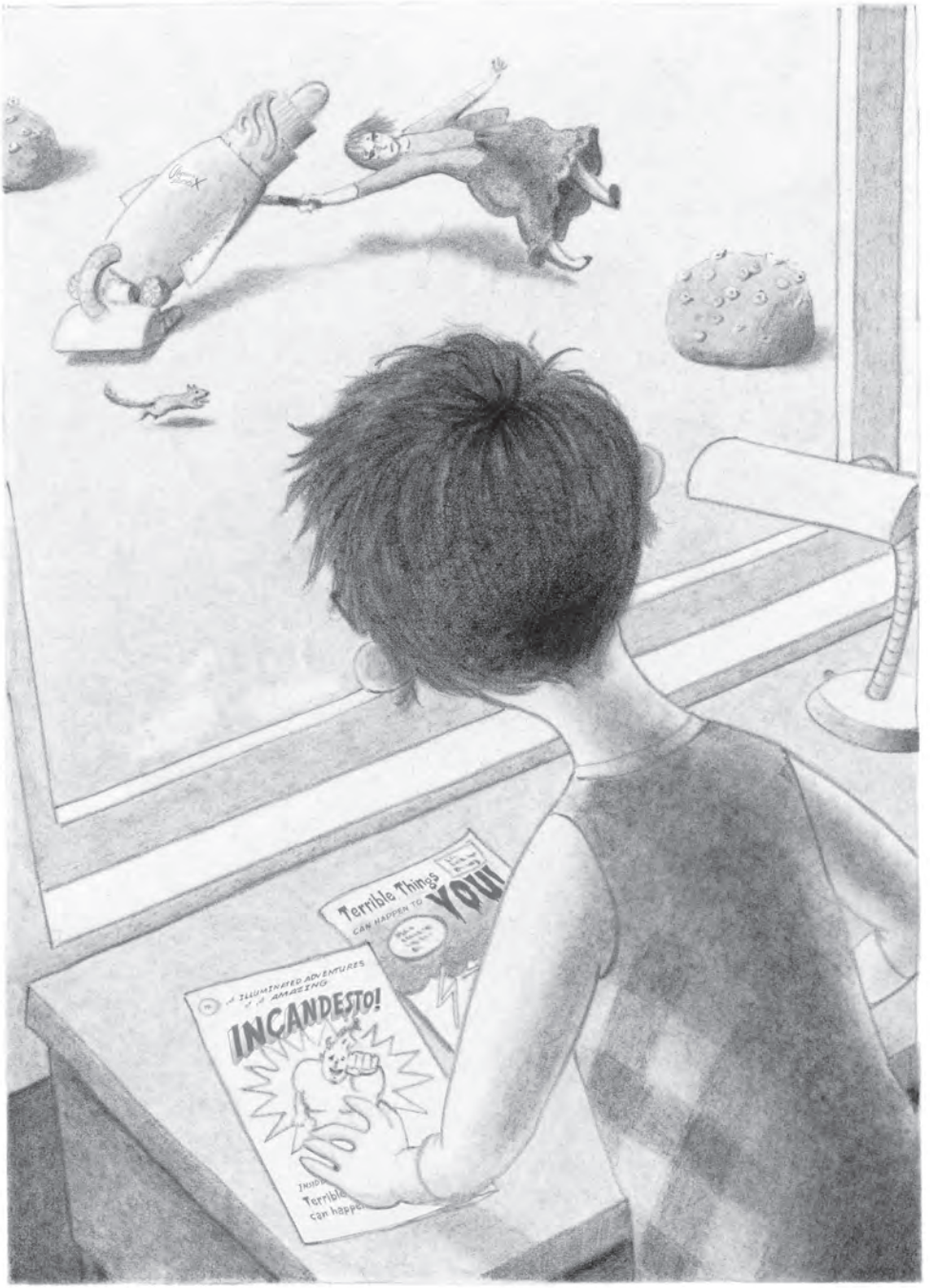
There is just no predicting what kind of sentences you might say, thought Flora. *For instance, who would ever think you would shout, "You're going to vacuum up that squirrel!"?*

It didn't make any difference, though, what words she said. Flora was too far away. The vacuum cleaner was too loud. And also, clearly, it was bent on destruction.

"This malfeasance must be stopped," said Flora in a deep and superheroic voice.

"This malfeasance must be stopped" was what the unassuming janitor Alfred T. Slipper always said before he was transformed into the amazing Incandesto and became a towering, crime-fighting pillar of light.

Unfortunately, Alfred T. Slipper wasn't present.


Terrible Things
CAN HAPPEN TO
YOU!
INCANDESTO!

Where was Incandesto when you needed him?

Not that Flora really believed in superheroes. But still.

She stood at the window and watched as the squirrel was vacuumed up.

Poof. Fwump.

"Holy bagumba," said Flora.

CHAPTER TWO
The Mind of a Squirrel

Not much goes on in the mind of a squirrel.

Huge portions of what is loosely termed "the squirrel brain" are given over to one thought: food.

The average squirrel cogitation goes something like this: *I wonder what there is to eat.*

This "thought" is then repeated with small variations (e.g., *Where's the food? Man, I sure am hungry. Is that a piece of food?* and *Are there* more *pieces of food?*) some six or seven thousand times a day.

All of this is to say that when the squirrel in the Tickhams' backyard got swallowed up by the Ulysses 2000X, there weren't a lot of terribly profound thoughts going through his head.

As the vacuum cleaner roared toward him, he did not (for instance) think, *Here, at last, is my fate come to meet me!*

He did not think, *Oh, please, give me one more chance and I will be good.*

What he thought was *Man, I sure am hungry.*

And then there was a terrible roar, and he was sucked right off his feet.

At that point, there were no thoughts in his squirrel head, not even thoughts of food.

CHAPTER THREE
The Death of a Squirrel

Seemingly, swallowing a squirrel was a bit much even for the powerful, indomitable, indoor/outdoor Ulysses 2000X. Mrs. Tickham's birthday machine let out an uncertain roar and stuttered to a stop.

Mrs. Tickham bent over and looked down at the vacuum cleaner.

There was a tail sticking out of it.

"For heaven's sake," said Mrs. Tickham, "what next?"

She dropped to her knees and gave the tail a tentative tug.

She stood. She looked around the yard.

"Help," she said. "I think I've killed a squirrel."