

* * After Iris * *

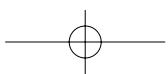
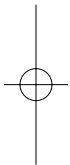
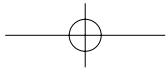
* THE DIARIES OF *
* Blamebell Gadsby *

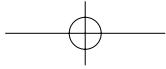
‘It was impossible to put down. When I finished, I was left craving more.’ Manon, age 14

‘Funny and poignant with lots of heart.’ *The Bookseller*

‘I absolutely loved it. I thought it was absolutely incredible and I definitely recommend the book for anyone who loves books about life’s ups and downs.’ Amy, age 9

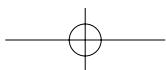
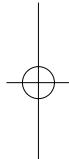
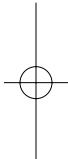
‘Quirky and hugely entertaining . . . An endearing, funny and satisfying read.’ Children’s Booksellers’ Choice

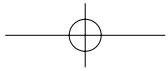




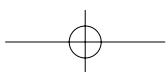
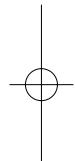
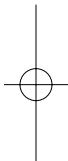
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

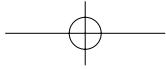
Natasha Farrant has worked in children's publishing for almost twenty years, running her own literary scouting agency for the past ten. She is the author of the Carnegie longlisted and Branford Boase shortlisted YA historical novel *The Things We Did For Love*, as well as two successful adult novels. She grew up in London where she still lives with her husband, their two daughters and a large tortoiseshell cat. She is the eldest of four siblings and has never dyed her hair pink.





BY THE SAME AUTHOR
The Things We Did for Love



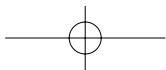


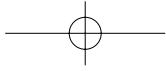
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NATASHA FARRANT

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faber and faber





First published in this edition in 2013

by Faber and Faber Limited

Bloomsbury House,
74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Typeset by Faber and Faber Ltd

Printed in the UK by CPI (UK) Ltd, CRO 4YY

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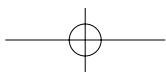
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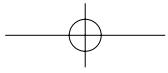
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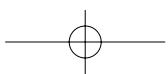
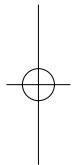


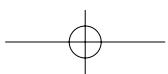
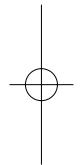
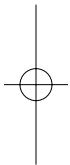
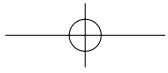
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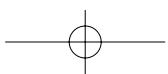
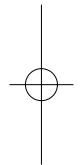
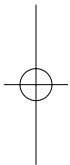
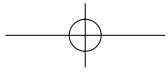


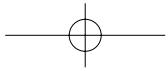
For Justine and Lily



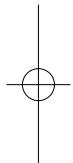
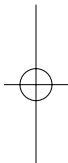


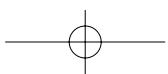
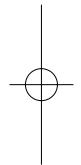
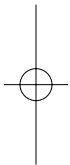
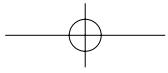
Being a combination of conventional diary entries and transcripts of short films shot by the author on the camera she was given for her thirteenth birthday, beginning at the end of summer.

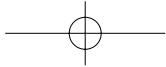




LONDON







The Film Diaries Of Bluebell Gadsby

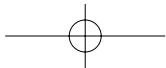
Scene One (Transcript)

Another Perfect Day in Paradise

DAYTIME. THE GADSBY FAMILY HOME.
GARDEN.

CAMERAMAN (BLUEBELL) lingers on a pair of feet in frayed canvas All-Stars (her own), before panning down stone steps to the garden where FLORA (16, her oldest sibling) is sunbathing in a bikini. Spread around her are her iPod, her mobile, a bottle of suntan lotion, a bottle of water and several magazines. She is reading a book.

Pan right, following the sound of squealing, to where younger siblings JASMINE (8) and TWIG (10) are playing on the swing under the plane tree. Jasmine falls. Twig whoops. Jasmine howls. Blood pours from her split lip,



staining her torn pink dress. Twig - no longer whooping - runs towards the house. Pan left, back to Flora turning up the volume on her iPod, then indoors to kitchen. Picture shakes as cameraman (still Blue) plucks a tea-towel from the cooker. Back outdoors to close-up of Jasmine's blood-smeared face. Picture is inverted as cameraman applies the tea-towel to Jasmine's lip.

JASMINE

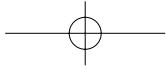
Agh! Agh!! Agh!!!

TWIG

It's not my fault! It's not my fault!

FLORA

I AM TRYING TO LISTEN TO MY MUSIC?



Friday 26 August: Morning

Flora heard something in the kitchen this morning and said it wasn't fair to make her go down alone.

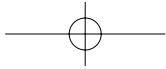
'Just because I am the oldest,' Flora said, 'does not mean I have to be the first to die.'

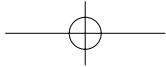
So we grabbed what we could, which was a cricket bat for Twig and tennis rackets for Jas and me, and the big oar Dad got in Oxford with all his boat crew's names on it for Flora. For a family that never plays sport we have an awful lot of equipment. Jas said Dad would kill Flora if she broke the oar and Flora said she'd remember that when her entire family had been murdered because she hadn't been properly armed. But in the end we didn't need to hit the burglar, because when we got to the kitchen he turned out to be Zoran, and even though we didn't know yet that it was him, he was wearing a flowery apron and sandals and a little goatee beard that made him look like Mr Tumnus in *Narnia*, who everybody knows was on the right side in the end even if he did have his moments.

'Who are you and what are you doing here?' demanded Flora.

'I am your new babysitter,' said Zoran.

'A babysitter!' cried Flora. 'But why?'





Zoran gave Jas what Dad calls *a laden look* and she bit her lip so we couldn't see the stitches they gave her at the hospital.

'Your mother called me last night,' said Zoran.
'She was worried.'

'But how does she even *know* you?' asked Flora.

We all stared at him. It seemed so unlikely that Mum should know someone like Zoran.

'Through your father,' said Zoran.

'Ah,' said Flora.

And that was that. Zoran didn't elaborate and we didn't ask.

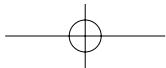
'Let's tidy up, shall we?' he said instead. 'Then we can all have breakfast.'

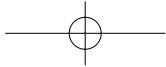
His shoulders drooped a bit when he said the tidying up bit and looking round the kitchen, I have to say I could see why. Flora keeps her room tidy but treats the rest of the house like a squat. The rest of us just squat.

'Does *anybody* do the dishes?' Zoran gazed up at the ceiling when he said that, like God might actually care.

'They're only last night's,' said Flora.

Zoran smirked as he picked up a stack of plates. I could have warned him, but I didn't. He took one step backwards, landed on Twig's remote-controlled





Aston Martin DB2/4 Competition Spider, and vanished in a crash of china.

*

Zoran announced he had concussion. The Babes (aka Twig and Jas) sat cross-legged at his feet and cut bandages out of a sheet they found in the washing machine, which Flora wound around his head while they explained about the Aston Martin.

‘They’re for the rats,’ said Jas. ‘We have three. White, with pink eyes.’

‘We use Daddy’s ties to strap them in and then we race them,’ said Twig. ‘We’ve got lots of different models. The Spider’s mine but it’s OK because you didn’t damage it.’

‘I’ve got a Jag XK120,’ said Jas. ‘The rats love it, they really do.’

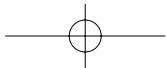
‘There!’ Flora stopped winding and turned Zoran towards the mirror.

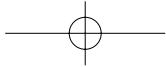
Zoran gasped. Jas started to cry because laughing stretched her stitches. Twig snorted so hard snot came out of his nose.

‘Oh my God!’ cried Zoran. ‘I look like an Egyptian mummy!’

‘You said you were concussed!’ protested Flora.

Zoran looked cross but Flora gave him her





scrunched-up nose grin, the one that makes her look like she's about ten years old instead of sixteen. Nobody can ever resist that grin.

'Thank you for rescuing me,' Zoran grumbled.

Flora started to laugh then too, and then they were all laughing, except Zoran laughed less than the others.

'I wish I'd filmed this,' I said.

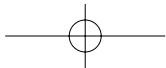
They all stared at me.

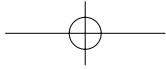
'You spoke!' said Zoran. 'I was wondering if you knew how.'

He was standing up now and the Babes walked round and round him with a roll of toilet paper, finishing off the process Flora had started on his head. That would have made a good film too, but what I wanted to get – what I was cross I'd missed – was that look between him and Flora, when she said she thought he was concussed and he said he looked like an Egyptian mummy.

She grinned and he melted.

That was when I knew we had nothing to fear from him.





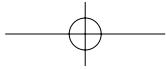
The Film Diaries Of Bluebell Gadsby

Scene Two (Transcript) Mother and Daughter

DAY. THE GADSBY GARDEN.

The garden again, this time seen from above through the branches of the plane tree. MOTHER, barefoot but otherwise still dressed for work, is harvesting a lavender bush with a pair of rusty shears. When all the stalks are cut, she crouches to gather them into a waiting basket. She buries her face in her hands, and her shoulders relax as she inhales the scent of the flowers.

FLORA, also barefoot but in denim cut-offs, appears on the stone veranda at the top of the steps. Sound does not reach the camera, but it is obvious she is annoyed. Mother takes a step

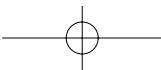


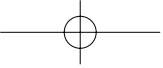
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towards her then stops to pick a stalk from her basket. She runs her index finger and thumb along the stem to strip it of its flowers, which she crushes in her fist. She inhales again then opens her hand and holds it out before her. The breeze scatters the flowers. Mother squares her shoulders and turns towards her angry daughter.

Picture fades to black as CAMERAMAN (BLUE) turns camera off to climb back down to the ground.

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Friday 26 August: Afternoon

‘He’s weird,’ announced Flora, back in the kitchen.

‘He used to be a student of your father’s. He’s doing his doctorate in medieval literature, and he is a very nice young man.’ Mum had put her shoes back on, the Louboutin pumps with the red soles which make her look like she is taller than Flora.

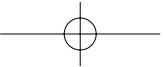
They couldn’t see me where I was standing just outside the door. Mum looked tiny through the camera, but I could see her hand clenching and unclenching like it often does when she is fighting with Flora.

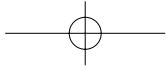
‘We don’t even *need* a babysitter,’ shouted Flora.
‘I’m sixteen! In some countries I’d be married.’

‘He is not a babysitter, he is an au pair. And you are not in *some countries*.’

Flora looked stormy and didn’t say anything. Mum reached out to touch her but she stepped away. Mum sighed.

‘Now that the summer is over, I am going to be travelling again, and with your father based in Warwick of course we need a babysitter. I left your brother and sisters with you for *one day*, Flora, and Jas ended up in hospital! Zoran can help you with homework when school starts again. He’s rather





brilliant, your father says. And it'll be fun for Twig and Jas, like having a big brother.'

'What about Blue?'

'What do you mean, what about Blue?'

'What *about* me?' I asked, and they both jumped.

'Stop creeping *up* on people!' said Flora. 'And stop *looking* at everyone through that stupid camera.'

'It's not on. And it's not stupid.'

'You have homework too,' said Mum.

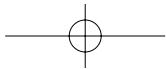
'But I never need help with it,' I pointed out.

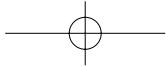
'Genius,' muttered Flora, but Mum smiled at me.

'Then he will just be a presence, my darling. A happy presence.'

*

Once upon a time, about fourteen years ago, there were two little dots that grew into grains that grew into beans then babies, and they lived in the same warm-water-filled sac, where they got fed through a long tube that went straight into their stomachs. The babies grew ears and mouths and fingers and toes, and they lived curled around each other. Doctors took photographs of them and people said that they were like two peas in a pod. Even before they were born, their parents called the babies Iris and



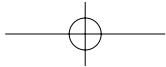


Bluebell – spring names for spring babies, they said. When it was time for them to leave the water everybody thought Bluebell would go first because she was biggest, but Iris beat her to it and shot headlong into the world so fast the midwife almost dropped her.

Grandma says that nothing could ever stop Iris rushing, not even me. It's how she was born, and ten years later it was how she died.

Iris has been dead for three years. Flora cried and cried when it happened, but I'm not sure she ever thinks about her now. Not the way I do. Sometimes I dream that we're still sleeping curled around each other, and when I wake up my arms are reaching out for her. Once when Grandma was staying with us after the funeral, she said that sometimes people don't have to speak to each other to know what they are thinking, and that Iris and I had a special bond because we were twins. She said that when soldiers had limbs amputated in the war, they could still feel the arm or leg or foot that had been cut off and that this was what losing Iris was like for me. She said the memory of Iris would always be with me.

'Like a soldier without a foot,' Flora said. 'Blue will have to hop,' she added, but Grandma said that wasn't what she meant at all.



At first when Iris died I used to see her everywhere. She felt so close I used to think our shadows had got mixed up. Sometimes now, if the sun is behind me when I am filming and I can see my own shadow I still pretend it's hers, but it's not the same, and Mum going on about big brothers and happy presences makes me want to scream, because I know that's not what she's really talking about, what she's really talking about is Iris and her unhappy absence.