

Ssh! It's A Secret!

Remember the bittersweet joys and perils of heady first love in this absolutely enchanting story by an exciting new novelist

By Giselle Green

Freezing for a moment on my way through the front door, heading for the stairs, I listen intently. Oh no! Nan's in! In fact, if I lean back a bit I can see through into the lounge where she's sitting quietly watching her favourite programme *Gardener's World*.

"Louise, is that you, lovey? I'm afraid I've got a bit of a confession to make..."

I draw back, perplexed. I thought Thursday was bingo afternoon? Ever since Nan came to live with us, it seems there's always someone in the house, no matter what time of day or night.

I didn't want Nan to see the balloons I'd bought for Darryl – I had to have some kind of privacy

Last year I didn't mind so much. It was cool having her here. She'd bake buns and there'd always be something nice in the oven when I came home from school. But I'm at secondary school now, aren't I?

"Louise?" I hear her voice.

"Yeah, Nan, it's me. I'm just..." I vault up the stairs before she comes out and catches me with these balloons, especially the red heart ones. I don't want her getting any ideas. Darryl's like a brother to me. I don't fancy my neighbour or anything.

If she thought that, Nan would tell Mum and Dad and then they'd be glancing at me

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Giselle lives in Kent and is a devoted mum to six boys, including twins. In 1999 she qualified as an astrologer and now works part-time specialising in medieval astrology. *Pandora's Box* is her debut novel.

all the time and exchanging secretive little smiles. I couldn't stand that.

You see, Darryl and me, we're just mates. It's his birthday today and the red heart balloons are just a kind of joke between us, that's all; they wouldn't understand.

"Louise?" Nan's coming up the stairs after me now. Oh, come on! I've got to find somewhere to hide the balloons till later. There's no space for me in this house to have a private life, is there?

"You know that programme you'd set the TV to tape earlier?" she's saying tentatively. "The one with all the rock bands..."

"Yup?" I stand up, looking around for inspiration. I don't seem to have many

options here. The balloons won't fit under the bed. They will only fit into my wardrobe if I take everything else out first. I just don't have anywhere at all to hide things, anything... It just isn't fair.

"Well, I'm really sorry," she pops her head around my bedroom door. "But I think I've just deleted it."

Whoa! Now she's got my attention. "You've what?" My voice is faint because just at this moment I really can't think of anything worse that could happen.

Just the whole entire school is going to be talking about this concert on Monday and is she really telling me now that I'll be the only girl who hasn't seen it?

"You can't have deleted it," I tell her faintly. "I set the programme in the 'permanent' memory holder, on purpose. It would have been impossible for you to erase anything unless..."

"I was looking for Channel Four," she confesses. "I pressed the 4 and a whole series of options came up instead of the

channel. Things like 'set-up mode' and 'memory options'..." Nan looks perplexed.

"I only wanted to change the channel. You used to be able to press a button on the TV and do it," she adds sadly.

Press a button on the TV? Whatever is she on about? I close my eyes for a moment and count to five before I answer her.

"You... you must have used the wrong remote! Why did you... why did you even touch it? You know you don't understand these things. You should have waited till someone else got home." The accusations tumble out of my mouth even though I don't really want them to – I can't help it.

I bang my fist on the bed in frustration and her face looks really sad.

"I was baking us some rock buns." She shakes her head, blaming herself. "I forgot about the time and then when I went to sit down I thought I could rewind my programme just like you do..."

She's talking about *Rock buns!*

"No," I tell her through gritted teeth, "you can't do that, Nan."

I pull my T-shirt down over my jeans. Nan's partly the reason why I'm the girl in my class who most needs to lose a bit of weight. I don't want her buns any more.

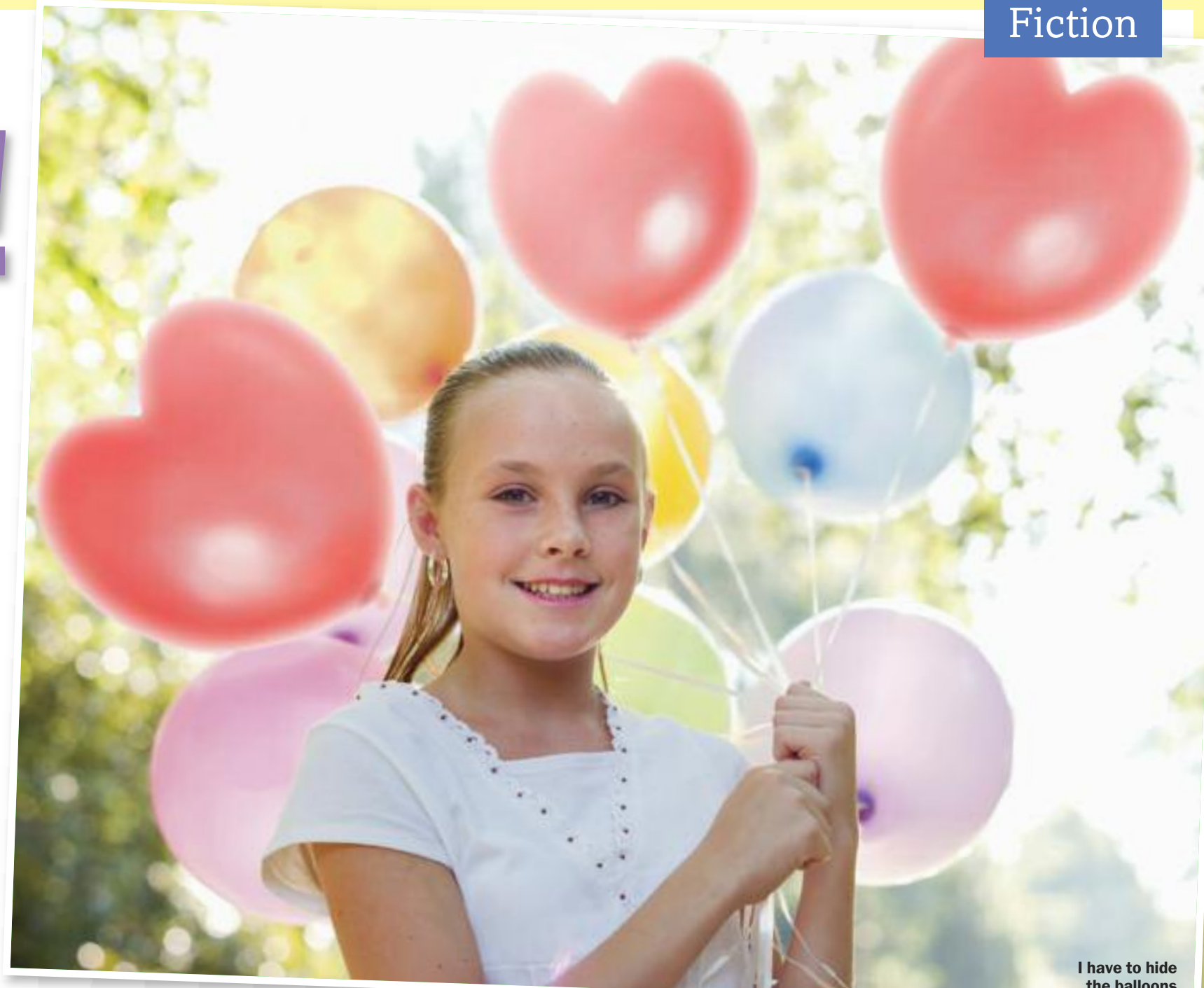
And I don't want her to always be here, I realise suddenly, hanging around so she can report my comings and goings to Mum and Dad afterwards. I can hear it now.

I think she got in about five, she's been in about two hours now; she's been quiet as a mouse, up in her room. I think she's doing her homework, but I'm not sure.

"I've seen it advertised though," she insists, hopefully. "These days you can rewind live TV. I've seen it."

"You can only do that when the programme's taped. Or when you've got Tivo or Sky+, which we don't."

Oh, for goodness' sake! Why can't my nan be more like my friend Hannah's nan, who texts her all the time with useful stuff



I have to hide the balloons

like new ring-tones to download and takes her out to buy underwear and shoes?

My nan doesn't *do* shopping. She does gardening. Her idea of us "doing something together" is me helping her sow marrows, prune roses or re-pot dahlias.

It's embarrassing, frankly. Stacey's nan smells of perfume but last time Stacey came round, mine smelt of the manure she'd just plastered around the rose-bushes.

Or Nan'll offer to take me to some exhibition at the British Museum to see the mummified remains of ancient Egyptians and I'm standing there going like – *why?*

Why does anyone care about 2000-year-old dead people? That's all in the past, and we've got to move on. My nan probably thinks I'm still interested in *Little Pony* magazines and ... and skipping ropes.

She actually brought one down from the attic for me to use, the other day. "It'll be good for your figure," she told me. "We used to use them all the time when I was a girl."

Doesn't she understand that people have gyms for that sort of thing these days? And

I catch a glimpse of Darryl and my heart starts thudding. I never used to feel this way about him

that's also why nobody bakes rock buns!

Doesn't she understand anything? "Oh!" Her eyes light up, all crinkly and happy all of a sudden. I turn round just in time to see one of the red balloons escape from its bag and float up towards the ceiling behind me. I don't believe it!

"Those are pretty," she says delightedly. "Did you buy them for-?"

"Maisie," I get in before she finishes her sentence. Too late, the word has escaped from my mouth before I have the chance to stop it and now my pesky little sister is

going to get these lovely balloons that I've just spent the last of my pocket money on and it's all because Nan had to see them before I had a chance to –

"Well, actually, I was just going to leave them with Darryl next door," I croak. "So **Continued overleaf...**

Continued from previous page

Maisie doesn't see them. It's not her birthday for another two days yet," I finish.

I lift up the bottom of my duvet cover to see if I've left my shoes under the bed and Nan nods, looking very thoughtful.

"That's – that's really very sweet of you." Nan's got a soft little smile on her face.

"Were you planning on going over right this minute?" She pulls down my window a bit so my balloons can't escape.

"I see they've got plenty of balloons next door already for Darryl's birthday party," she says conversationally.

"Have they?" I fold my arms casually and sit back down on my bed, not looking.

"Tons of them. I can see them from here." She looks purposefully out of the window for a minute before moving forward to the door.

I have to get up because I see now I've left my shoes by the door. I glance down over the top of our garden myself, as I go by the window. You can see next door's gazebo from here. She's right about the balloons.

"Of course, Darryl's that little bit older than you," Nan muses, concentrating on her wrist-watch. She always has to re-set the



Frankly, Nan is a dinosaur

If she suspected anything, she would say she "knew what I was going through" and that she'd once felt about a boy, just like this, when she was around my age, but of course she didn't because times have changed and though I'll always love my nan, sadly, she's a dinosaur and she knows absolutely nothing whatsoever.

which is why she got me to look out of this window in the first place...

"Hey, shall we go and see if there's anything of that rock show actually taped?" I say suddenly, giving her a fierce look, defying her to say anything about young love and how it was all the same in her day, because it *so* wasn't.

Of course it wasn't the same in her day. Everything changes – it's changing all the time – today has certainly proved that to me. Nothing stays the same forever.

Nan puts her hand on my shoulder. I'm grateful she doesn't mention the rock buns. I don't think I could have coped with that. Eating is not the comfort I need right now.

"I think we may just be in luck," she says and I twist round then and for one brief moment when she gives me a hug, she smells of buns, just baked and fresh from the oven; she smells of the earth from the garden and the light in her eyes reminds me of sunshine on a summer's day.

For once, I'm really so glad that, even though everything changes – there are some things that will remain the same.



NEXT WEEK

Look out for our super light-hearted romance, *Dreaming Of A Hero*.

Stacey's nan smells of perfume but last time Stacey came round, mine smelt of manure

dials because it keeps losing time but she won't get a new one because it's the one Grandpa gave her and she still misses him. It's out of date, stuck in the past, like her!

"Darryl must be – what – sixteen?"

"Yeah, about that." I shrug, looking up at the ceiling. Well, I can't hang about here all day. I slip my shoes back on and hope she's going to take the hint.

"I'm surprised he still wants that many balloons," she says significantly and I reluctantly take a peek out over his garden again. OK, he's got a load of balloons. It's a celebration. So what?

Behind the bobbing display I catch a glimpse of the birthday boy and my heart starts thudding. I never used to feel this way when I looked at Darryl.

I glance sideways at Nan but she's still re-setting her watch, thank goodness.

I take a casual look out again. The thought pops up. Darryl hasn't actually invited me to his 16th birthday party, has he? Not that I'd need an invite. Not me. And not that I'd care even if he didn't invite me.

The breeze moves the bobbing balloons over by the gazebo to one side for a moment and I freeze. Darryl isn't actually alone down there, I see now. That super-slim Rachel Brightman from his year is down there with him and they're...

My face flames red and I feel a surge of anger hit me, right here, in the stomach.

Darryl never told me he was actually seeing anyone? And we're mates, him and me. We've been mates for years. He should have told me something as important as this. I've got a right to know.

"Well, I think it was really kind of you to think about your little sister like that,