

Another Side Of Nan - By Gavin Burgess

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Parental Note:

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Another Side of Nan

On October twelfth Mum and Dad moved Nan into the home. It seems unkind now but at the time I was glad to see her go. Nan was, I now know, my great grandmother. Back then she was just Nan. Some other things I now know are that Nan was my father's mother's mother. It seems, although no-one would talk about it, that my father's mother became involved with an American soldier during the war and with him conceived a son, my father. (I heard this whispered when the grown-ups were drinking and I guess they meant the second world war although they never said in so many words. But by the way they talked I figured becoming involved was something sort of thrilling and naughty all at the same time and wondered what it would be like to be involved myself one day.) My father never knew his mother. She died giving him birth, and my grandfather was never heard from again. Maybe he died in the war against the Japanese. Maybe he lived on without another thought for the New Zealand girl he'd left behind. Maybe he searched for her in vain. Either way he was gone, she was gone, but my father survived, in the care of his grandmother, my great-grandmother, Nan.

I didn't really understand much of what was going on at the time. Nan was someone we didn't like much. She dribbled and wore ugly Nan sized nappies which always stank. I'd gotten sort of used to them by the time they sent her away and had learnt to always turn on the bathroom light if I got up in the night, not just in case Nan was sitting there in the dark, but because even if she wasn't you could almost guarantee she'd left one of her horrid nappies in

there. I'd stooden* on one once when I was twelve, a gushy feeling between my toes and a sinking feeling in my stomach, and wouldn't do it again, of that I'd make really sure. Nan was pretty horrible, and she hated Dad. Somehow he'd done something terrible which she could never forgive. It was as if the mere fact that he'd been born was enough to raise her loathing. Whatever the reason, it seemed more excusable then than it does now that they eventually took over her house and sent her away.

Nan went to the Golden Fields Rest Home out by the river mouth. It's not there any more (I think it was where the rugby field is now) but it was a good place in its day. (This was another thing I learned listening in during drinks, when Dad held forth about sport and politics to his mates from the Post Office while they played pool in the shed and Mum talked about interesting stuff with the wives in the house.) Apparently Nan was very happy there because they all said so and anyway it didn't really matter if the old hag was happy or not because soon enough she was going to die, and, sure thing, soon enough she did which proved that they were right and she really had been happy after all, although why she would want to go and die just to prove the old man and his cronies right when she'd argued with him her whole life sure beats me quite as much now as it did right back then. I might have been a kid, and a small timid kid with freckles and unruly blonde hair at that, but there are some things that I just couldn't quite believe, even at age thirteen.

(* 'Stooden' isn't a real word. It's a word I made up. I thought I should let you know! – G.B.)

Anyway, the oddest thing about all this was that the very day that Dad dropped Nan off at the rest home, after he had gotten home again, cuddled Mum, and had a beer, was that he pulled a brand new jemmy bar from a Carter's bag and demolished the kitchen, and I really mean demolished! Cupboards, sink bench, stove, walls, linoleum, ceiling panels all went out the door into a steaming pile festering in the springtime humidity. I remember three things most vividly from this afternoon, so surreal it appeared to my adolescent mind. The first is my Dad, vaguely absurd as his weedy frame grappled with the unfamiliar tool and the piles of matchwood his efforts produced, the second, my Mum hugging my filthy sweating old man and telling him she couldn't believe she would finally be getting the kitchen she'd always dreamed of, and the third is finding the book.

Dad was having another break for another beer. Mum was out buying fish and chips which was just as well because Dad's break this time had started just after she went out the door and had turned into a rather long one. Anyway, I was prowling in the kitchen, marvelling at the destruction and wondering where Mum would cook our meals for the rest of our lives. (It turned out to be on the old kitchen cabinets propped up in the laundry for the next two years and then after that somehow Mum and Dad found some money to get a builder to put the kitchen right back where it had been in the first place.) The inside parts of the walls were full of spiders and dead bugs and cobwebs and Dad had suggested that I might like to help by cleaning these up with a hand brush, which was an idea I wasn't too keen on, what with spiders and bugs and cobwebs and all not being in any way close to my favourite things, but I

figured I should at least make the semblance of an attempt as Dad was apt to slap us kids and occasionally Mum around a bit if we 'pissed him off' after a few beers. Don't get me wrong here, he wasn't a beater, not generally, and mostly he was loving and kind but just sometimes we'd make him far too angry and that was that. Mum told us he did it because really he loved us and it was just his way. Anyway, Dad had never had a father and only Nan who hated him so I guess he just had to make it all up as he went along. This was what Mum said and if she was right then I guess he didn't do too bad over all. So anyway, I'm poking away at the cobwebs, moving a few and really just trying to stuff them back into the walls without touching them and in the middle of it all I see what looks like a mouldy old board, sitting loose inside the wall. I poke at a bit to see if I can push it out of sight but it's not going any further in so I very cautiously stick my hand into the hole and pull the thing out. It's not a board at all but an old book that turns out to be a diary and one of the most interesting things I find in my life.

About this time Mum arrives back with the fish and chips, Dad rushes into the kitchen, drops his beer behind a pile of rubble, grabs his jemmy and starts beating on the wall, and I quickly stuff the book up my jumper and run upstairs to 'wash my hands'. It should make them suspicious that I actually willingly undertake this chore but it seems they have too much else happening to take much notice, especially as Mum immediately sees how many beers are no longer in the fridge. Despite the state of the place things then resume a remarkable semblance of normality, what with Mum suggesting to Dad that the Maoris down the road have been in and nicked his beers, (I don't know

why Mum always blames Maoris when things go missing because the Maoris I know are all pretty nice, but Mum always says they are 'huckory', even though she's part Maori herself.) and Dad suggesting to Mum that she's pushing her luck and he's been working damn hard for her all afternoon and she's just an unappreciative lady dog (if you know what I mean) and a man deserves a few beers at the end of a hard day. Anyway, in the middle of all this no-one thinks twice about why I've rushed up the stairs so eagerly so it's all fine with me either way and at the end of it all (as Mum likes to say) no-one loses an eye.

Sequestered in my room later that night I begin to investigate my find. I figure that it's so old that whoever wrote it is probably dead by now and, with this assumption firmly established in my mind as fact, that it's OK to read the diary. Little do I know at the time that this decision will mark the beginning of a friendship which becomes as real to me as any friendship I have with anyone at school, and even a bit more special because this is a secret friendship with a friend that no-one else can share, a friend who lives only in the pages of this tatty old book but who's story reflected through it's pages marks a turning point in my life.

Tucked into the pages of the diary is an old grey photo, all brown and ugly at the edges and creased up like it's been in someone's pocket, and across the bottom someone's written 'Emily and I'. It's a photo of two girls, about the same age as me I guess, wearing very old fashioned looking clothes. They're grinning like monkeys though and the photo is a bit blurred in places like they were moving really fast when it was taken. (I find out later that in the olden

days you have to sit still for a long time to have your photo taken so that a lot of photos end up like this when people can't stop themselves from shifting around.) On the inside cover is another photo, glued in place, of one of the girls again, but older, maybe sixteen or seventeen and looking very pretty. Someone has coloured the photo in with watercolour and the girl has pink cheeks and blonde hair (painted a sort of yellowish). Underneath the photo is handwritten the words 'Private Diary of Rose Audrey Smith, 1923'. So the other girl in the photo is Rose, and I'm right, she must be dead by now, or at least ancient, and not very interesting any more if that is the case. Probably old and disgusting like Nan. Ugh! I decide that I wouldn't like Rose very much old and that I should always imagine her as she is in the photo, about my age, or just a bit older, old enough to be interesting but not a grown-up yet. That would be too old (and boring). No, Rose must be just old enough, and no more! So I settle down under the duvet with the Lion on it that Mum had on her bed when she had her first flat. (She told me this one day and then looked sort of sad. 'Just remembering someone' was all she would say. 'Nobody really' she said, when I asked her who, and then she said she had to go to the bathroom and I thought I heard her crying but when she came out she looked all happy again but a little bit like she was pretending.) So I'm tucked under the duvet and looking at the picture of Rose, who I'm already starting to like, and I begin to read:

Thursday Twelfth June

(OK, so I jumped in at the middle.)

Dear Diary,

Thomas Bradbury was caned again this morning (for not having his cap and again for not doing his homework). The poor lout is always so sleepy in class anyway that he probably wouldn't know how to do his homework even if he tried. It must be horrid to be from such a poor family and to have a beastly drunk for a father. I'm so lucky to be from a good family. Emily said the strangest thing today. She thinks I like Thomas but really I don't. I just feel sorry for him, that is all. He will probably be a drunk too one day. I would never like a man like that. The fair arrives tomorrow.

Weather: Insipid. Raining all day and cold southerly. Got my stockings wet on the way to school and had cold feet all day.

Breakfast: The usual.

Lunch: Plum jam sandwiches. 1 apple.

Dinner: Mashed parsnip, Leeks, Beans, Mutton neck chops. Bread pudding.

I shift under the duvet and rearrange the pillows. I can still hear Mum and Dad downstairs, not shouting any more but murmuring and giggling along with the odd crash which seems to always precede some more giggling. Mum's overdue to come up and turn out my light so I make the most of the delay by reading a bit more:

Sunday Fifteenth June

Dear Diary,

I'm so sorry, I forgot you all weekend but there was so much going on with the fair. There were games of skill, which are run by the most disgusting men and are really just games of chance, or maybe not even that, and rides for a ha-penny, and ponies and horses (including a beautiful roan gelding which I would have taken home if only there had been a way), and toffee apples, and treats, and men selling potions and so many wonders and marvels that I was quite overwhelmed with the excitement of it all.

Emily and I spent almost the whole weekend taking rides and watching the amusements. We saw Thomas Bradbury there too but he didn't see us. He was picking up the mess from the horses and shovelling it into bags. His father was selling the bags to gardeners outside the back entrance to the fair. The money probably all went on whisky, the nasty old man. How absurd for Emily to ever think I could like a boy like Thomas. Ugh!

Emily and I argued over the bearded lady who I think was really a man in a dress.

I hear Mum on her way up the stairs and tuck the diary under my mattress, then pull it out again in case Mum decides to tuck me in, and shove it down into the bed, and then panic in case Mum sits on the bed and feels it in there, but then it's too late because Mum is opening the door. I'm in luck though because she seems eager to get things over with tonight, which seems a bit unusual as I can hear Dad getting into bed so there can't be much to be going to. Perhaps she's just tired too but she looks kind of excited and her eyes have gone sort of big. Anyway, the whole goodnight ritual seems to be over quite smartly and as the light is turned out I slide the diary back out from

under the duvet and realise that Mum hasn't even noticed that I'm still in my day clothes. Oh well, It's no skin off my nose although of course tomorrow I'm told off for wearing the same grubby things as yesterday. I stuff the diary down behind the bedside table, where I should have put it in the first place, and drift off to sleep dreaming of horses and toffee apples and men who sell potions which make ladies grow beards, and soon enough I'm right there with Rose and Emily spying on Thomas and agreeing with Rose that he's not really that much to look at and what a shame it is about his father, and of course Emily is winking and saying that she really is going to tell him that Rose likes him, and then there's a dreadful squealing from Rose and we all join in at the absurdity of it all, and the older girls treat me as an equal and not like I'm thirteen at all, and we three become the very best friends that ever lived.

Monday Sixteenth June

Breakfast: The usual.

Lunch: Ham sandwiches today. 1 apple.

Dinner: Mashed potato, Pumpkin, Beans, Ox Tongue. Rice Pudding made from last nights leftovers (mine had a piece of cauliflower in it!)

Weather: Same as Yesterday.

I'm back in my room, with the diary out again, paranoid in case of interruptions, with Mum downstairs, Dad in the shed with one of his Mates,

and my brother, just back from camp, floating around somewhere in the yard, or in the house, or possibly anywhere as long as it's somewhere he shouldn't be, and that definitely could include my room while I have the diary out so I'm doubly vigilant. It's been a most frustrating day anyway. I oversleep from being awake too late last night so I completely miss any opportunity to read the diary in the morning, and then, at breakfast, Mum decides, as she occasionally does, that today we are Christians and that we must all trundle off to church. This is when I get into trouble for still having yesterday's clothes on so everybody blames me when we creak our way into the old building ten minutes after the start of the service. Every neck in the place swivels like a hundred scenes from Living Dead (you know, the one with the lady pirouetting and her body stops but her head keeps going) and then finally we find a place and the disapproving glares of the assorted old ladies are once again focused in the direction of the balding bespectacled man at the front of the church. He's going on about the need to raise money for something or other and encouraging all to 'Dig deep for the glory of God'. 'Dig deep and bury the old guy.' I think to myself and incur more disapproving glares from the swivel necks by being unable to resist laughing out loud. Mum looks embarrassed. Dad seems to be in a faraway place. I spend the rest of the service wondering if Rose has ever sat in this old crumbling church, and imagining what it would have been like when she was here. This keeps me out of trouble for most of the time except when some guy jumps up at the front with his arms stuck into the air and starts gabbling a string of strange sounds, which leaves me thinking that we've stumbled into a nut house or maybe Nan's rest home on a quiet day, but then the Vicar explains that this is something called a move of

the spirit and that it's a new way for the church. Dad actually comes back from his far away place and shuffles uneasily for a moment but then he's off again. I lose Rose completely so begin shifting restlessly which yet again inflames the swivel necked biddies. At the collection Mum gives me our donation to put in the bag, which I give a little tap as it passes to make it jingle while palming the two fifty cent coins which are intended as our family's contribution to the glory of God until next time Mum feels religious. I'll be able to shout Rose and Emily to some ice-creams I think. Of course I know this is dumb but it's the thought that counts after all. Mum thinks she's given to God and I think I'll buy Rose an ice-cream and in the meantime I have a whole buck to stash away for when I need it. Everyone wins. Even God is OK because I'm pretty sure that if he owns a big old building like the church he probably doesn't have much use for a buck anyway. This all drags on until after one and, by the end of it, all you can hear is everyone's stomachs rumbling over the sound of the vicar rambling and even the jump-up-with-his-arms-in-the-air guy is looking quite sorry for himself, until finally there seems to be no particular reason for anyone to stay in their pews so we all dejectedly wander out. By now I've got stomach pains from the hunger but Mum has ensconced herself with the old biddies, who look even more like a hundred scenes from Living Dead now that they're out in the sunlight, even though they no longer swivel their necks but just slowly waddle their old bodies along. I can tell you it makes me really grateful that Rose and Emily and me are young and interesting. When we eventually get Mum away from the old biddies and are in the car on the way home (Dad having been sitting in there listening to something to do with rugby on the radio since his escape from the church), Mum tells us she's been

talking to an old Lady called Emily who'd known Nan when she was a girl living in a country town somewhere or other. I can't help thinking that, with all the names she could have, what right does an old crone like that have to the name Emily. It just doesn't seem fair that all day these grown ups and their oldies are crashing into my time with Rose and Emily, and so by the time we get home I'm in a fair steam which ends up with me refusing to set the table and being sent out for the afternoon to rake leaves while I cool down. So now it's nearly four and finally I get to have half an hour with the diary before I have to go down and help with dinner (which, as I said, is now prepared in the Laundry).

Tuesday Seventeenth June

Dear Diary,

We had an arithmetic test today. I got 98 and Emily got 93. She is mad at me because she thinks she is better at reckoning than me. It is so obvious that she is not which I told her quite plainly. She got into quite a huff over that and had the cheek to accuse me of cheating. I'm afraid we had quite a tiff and went our separate ways at the end of the day without our usual stop for sweets at the grocer's shop. She can really be most beastly at times. It is so obvious that I am better because I got more marks in the test. She should have studied harder instead of making up absurd fantasies about Thomas Bradbury. Thomas wasn't at school today.

Breakfast: The usual.

Lunch: Jam again today. 1 apple.

Dinner: Too upset to eat.

My world is shattered! I never thought that so soon into our new friendship I'd have to choose between Rose and Emily. How could Emily be so petty? And what if Rose really did cheat? And what happened to Thomas?

Wednesday Eighteenth June

Dear Diary,

You wouldn't believe what happened today. Emily let Thomas Bradbury walk her home! I can't believe she could be so insensitive when she knows how I like him. She's still not speaking to me over the test nor I her. She really is quite nasty sometimes and I don't see how a poor sensitive wretch like Thomas can have anything but a very unpleasant time with her. If I could but warn him off her,... but that would be a most unseemly thing to do. Oh what a dilemma. Dear Diary, I wish you could talk and tell me what to do about this dreadful thing.

Now I know that Emily is the mean one. I'm so sorry I ever doubted Rose and tell her so, gazing at her picture on the front of the diary and then staring at the photo of Emily and wishing her dead, then laughing at the absurdity of this as I realise that she probably is, then absorbing myself in the photo of Rose again. We hate Emily! I hope Thomas won't fall for her poison charms. I'll bet she bought some sort of potion at the fair to ensnare poor Thomas into her terrible trap. I can just imagine it too. She sounds so nasty. Poor Rose to have such a fickle friend. You should warn Thomas, Rose, you should!

Thursday Nineteenth June

Dear Diary,

I cannot believe the gall of that girl, my former friend Emily. The girl is quite a witch! Today she started talking to me as if nothing at all had ever happened. She even had the cheek to ask me to her house after school. (I said no of course!) All through recess she chattered away as if she had never called me a liar or told me she hated me or walked home with Thomas Bradbury. Thomas played rugby with the other boys this afternoon. He was thrown down several times but got right back up and chased the ball again. He really is quite well muscled and in his rugby jersey looked most handsome in a rugged sort of a way. He is starting to have a quite well defined beard too which seems to appear over the course of the day as if by some strange magic. Oh how truly remarkable men are. Emily is quite horrid and was smiling at him far too much. Once he saw me watching him though and looked quite red within moments. I must be careful that he does not get the wrong idea. Emily is behaving most un-virtuously.

I fall asleep tonight thinking of Rose but I wake up in the morning and discover that I've been dreaming about Thomas and in that delicious half awake, half dreamy state I can still feel his muscles and he's behind the bike sheds with me and I'm having some very strange feelings indeed and he's a bit grubby from his rugby game but so very gentle and nice...

At school I'm hardly paying attention, so that I end up on detention again, and get home late, and miss MASH on TV which is even worse than having to sit

and write lines, and Mum wants to know where I've been, and I make a lame excuse because I know if I tell her about detention she'll make it all way worse than it already is, and anyway I probably deserve detention because how could I think such things about Rose's boyfriend anyway. Eventually I get back up to my room and feel even more guilty* when I read Rose's entry for the next day.

Friday Twentieth June

Dear Diary,

I cannot quite believe it. I stayed late at school and helped Miss Clark tidy the room, just so I wouldn't have to walk home with Emily. Through the window I quite clearly saw her leave with Thomas Bradbury (I really do think that this sort of behaviour is quite unseemly) and yet when I left twenty minutes later he was outside and waiting for me! In fact wanting to walk ME home. The very cheek of the boy, thinking that I would be an easy woman like Emily, and does he think of himself as some sort of Romeo who can have any woman he desires when he is nothing but a dirty horse-muck shovelling son of a drunkard. I told him as much and he seemed so distraught that I immediately felt sorry for my harsh words and agreed that he could walk me as far as the alley (as there was little chance of us being seen together thus far) but that he must swear to secrecy as it would be most unseemly for a woman of such good breeding to be known to associate with the likes of him. Well could you believe that this caused him to launch upon a great diatribe regarding how he

(If our character had paid more attention at school she might have used the word 'guiltier' instead. – G.B.)*

planned to rise above his current station and how one day he dreamed of being deserving of a lady such as myself. I would have thought he was making fun of me if he had not been so obviously earnest and in the end I had to concede that he has, despite his rough cladding, the makings of the most wonderful gentleman. I thought to ask him about Emily but could not conceive of how to broach the subject so left him, at the alley, with a strange fluttering most prevalent in my breast.

I thought I'd lost the diary today. I've been looking for somewhere better to hide it for days now, somewhere where my beastly brother (I'm even starting to think like Rose) can't find it, and this afternoon, when Mum tells me to put my school shoes away or else, I remember the loose board in the bottom of the cupboard in my room. It lifts up pretty easy and sure enough there's plenty of space for the diary in there so I retrieve the precious book from behind the dresser and slip it in. No sooner do I let go when I hear a bit of a sliding whooshing sound and the whole thing disappears. There's a soft thunk from somewhere below and then silence. I'm lost in despair and have one of those sinking horror feelings like when you find out that you've accidentally killed the goldfish, or when you stuff up at school on the day before parent teacher evening. Anyway, it suddenly occurs to me that the kitchen is directly below and that the walls are still mostly open so I rush on down and there it is, right back where I found it, and I guess that solves the mystery of how it got there in the first place. The only thing is the picture of Rose and Emily is gone and no amount of searching or poking around inside the wall produces any sign of

it. In the end I figure that I still have the picture of Rose inside the cover and we really don't like Emily that much anymore anyway. Do we Rose?

Saturday Twenty First June

Dear Diary,

My day has been consumed with thoughts of Thomas. I saw that beastly Emily out today and just hope that she has not lured my Thomas into some compromising situation. I must confess I am quite overcome and should like to see him achieve every one of the many dreams and plans he shared with me on the evening last. I took a walk about the town this afternoon, quite hopeful that I would see Thomas out but he was nowhere to be found. I do so hope he wasn't with Emily. I am quite consumed with imagined jealousies!

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner: Far too upset to eat. Mother is worried about me but father is quite unconcerned as usual. He is most taken up about the idea of lamb exports again.

Weather: Better than Yesterday but about the same amount of wind.

I really do wish that if Rose is going to compare the weather to yesterday that she'd at least say what yesterday's weather was like!

Sunday Twenty Second June

Dear Diary,

Emily looked very smug at church this morning and although she spoke kindly to me I don't trust her any more. She had the cheek to ask me if I'd seen Thomas over the weekend. Of course I told her that the idea was absurd. Why she persists to maintain that I have any interest in such an oaf is beyond me. Ladies simply do not associate with such types. I fear that Emily is not much of a lady at all and I have purposed to distance myself from her at all costs. Also I must not again associate with Thomas Bradbury. The vicar spoke at some length today about the merit of virtuous behaviour. I feel quite inspired by God to be an example to all, especially Emily who falls so short of the glory of Him to whom we must all answer.

Sunday dinner at the Alsbury's, which was really quite superb. We are so lucky to be acquainted with such an upstanding family. Father has done very well in establishing us as a family of note in our little town.

I knew it! I knew Rose had been in the church. It must have been our church if the diary was in our house! Maybe we even sat in the same pew. Every day I feel more and more like Rose is right here with me. I imagine Rose inspired by God and I'm sure that she would never have leapt up with her arms in the air. She's so graceful and beautiful and ladylike that I hope I'll be like her one day. It's sad about Thomas but it seems like she's doing what God wants her to do. I think I'll try to be inspired by God too. At least the way Rose is, but definitely with no leaping up or arms-in-the-air or gabbling. Obviously being inspired by God has made Rose such a better person and I'm sure that if I can be even a bit like her then I'll be a much better person too. Tonight I even

say a prayer before I get into bed. I don't feel all that different but maybe it'll take a bit of time. I'm feeling guilty about the buck from the collection as well and promise God that I'll put it back next time we go to church. I figure that this could be at least several months away which will give me the excuse of forgetting about the whole thing, but then I feel guilty again because someone once told me God knows all your thoughts, which makes praying a bit of a pointless thing really I think, and means that he knows about every bad thing I've ever thought and probably all about what I let John Webster do behind the bike shed, but he hasn't blasted me with lightning like he did to that cathedral in England, or turned me into salt like Lott's wife, so maybe he didn't actually notice after all. It probably would've been better if I just hadn't told him about the buck from the collection bag in the first place.

Saturday Twenty Eight June

Dear Diary,

I am so sorry I have not written you over this last week. It really has been most astonishing and only now can I bring myself to bring forth the facts and emotions which course through my being like great taniwha's in the river of my life. Thomas walked me home on Monday, just as he had on Friday and Emily glared at me with quite open hatred. I do not care less as she is obviously a most unworthy friend. Thomas talked again about his great plans and they sound most grand! It seems that he is quite set on becoming a worthy citizen, most unlike his unfortunate father, and has many schemes to rise above his current standing. He says he has a successful uncle with a thriving business in the city who has agreed to allow Thomas to take on an

apprenticeship there in a few years. Could you believe I really think he was suggesting that we marry and that I go there with him. My, but what would father say, his daughter married to the son of the town drunk. The idea was so absurd that I could scarce contain my laughter, and yet Thomas really is a most striking lad. I found myself quite unable to resist permitting him to hold my hand, and later this week allowed him the most unimaginable liberties which left me feeling most overwhelmed, both cheapened and invigorated, and yet I have so little guilt as I couldn't quite imagine anything that could be so overwhelming and yet at the same time so all-consumingly pleasant as that which Thomas and I enjoyed together. I now resolve though, to put all this behind me as he is quite obviously well below the station of man such as I am most definitely capable of winning as husband and as such can only bring me shame and lower my elevated position in this town as the only daughter of such a well esteemed man as my father.

This part I don't really understand and read it several times to make sure. If Rose is so sure that she must not see Thomas again then why does she let him walk her home, let alone hold her hand (although it sounds like that would be quite exciting if Thomas is as muscley* as she says) and what are 'unimaginable liberties'. It seems like something quite amazing has happened to Rose but I can't quite figure it all out, and why, if she likes Thomas so much, does it matter what people think? I didn't mind when John Webster stuck his hand down my pants behind the bike sheds even though Pauline

(* This is another made up word but I wasn't the one who made it up. – G.B.)

Browne saw and told everyone! Surely a liberty couldn't be as naughty as that. It's not like she was involved or something!

Saturday Nineteenth July

Dear Diary,

I have been living most virtuously over the last month and yet I am quite consumed with the most terrible fear. Last week my women's troubles were due and yet they have not arrived. I have waited since last Monday and still nothing. I fear that God has cursed me for my one indiscretion and that there is no hope for me. I have determined that I am to kill myself rather than suffer the disrepute of the thing I fear. How could God be so cruel as to not spare me from the tyranny of one terrible mistake? I have remained so virtuous since, not associating again with Thomas Bradbury or with that terrible woman Emily who I have seen hanging off his arm like some sort of cheap harlot. How could a woman such as myself have fallen into such a grave mistake. I am in despair and yet determined that mine and my family's good name not be sullied by this terrible thing.

Lucky Rose, missing out on her woman's troubles (which I think must mean her period). I've had women's troubles twice now and it's really not very nice. The first one frightened me because I thought I was dieing and the second one was just as bad because Mum had forgotten to tell me that it would happen again and so I thought there was something really wrong with me. I think my Dad has started to stutter just like the guy at the fish and chip shop because when I told him about this he went pale and seemed like he couldn't

get his words out at all. The same thing happened again on the way to school this morning when I asked him what a cheap harlot was and he gave me exactly the same reply which was that I should talk to my Mum. I must tell her that Dad might need a doctor soon because there must be something quite nasty happening with his brain like a kind of stroke or something (Joyce De Lauter's grandma had one of these and she ended up talking funny too.) At least he seems to be able to accept that he is having trouble speaking and I know Mum won't mind doing all the talking for him if his condition gets any worse. I'm not sure if asking Mum about the cheap harlot is a good idea though. Yesterday I told her I thought it would be nice to have unimaginable liberties that made me feel cheapened and invigorated and ended up getting grilled for the next hour and a half about who I'd been talking to. Now I have to come straight home from school every day and I missed MASH again. Hawkeye's such a hunk! I bet Rose would love him.

Sunday Twentieth July

Dear Diary,

Still no sign of relief from this terrible fear. The vicar spoke most strongly against disreputable behaviour today and I am quite cursed with guilt and know now that I will never again be acceptable to God or able to avail myself of his blessing. Oh what a poor wretch I am. All my dreams are wasted away and now the thought of running off with Thomas Bradbury begins to seem more like a rescue than a laughable boy's dream. Dear Diary, what am I to do?

This is starting to sound awfully like Rose has been 'involved' to me. I'm so sad for her. She seems so terribly afraid. I think maybe her unimaginable liberties were a lot like my dream about Thomas and I'm not sure why that could have been such a terrible thing. Rose suddenly seems a lot older than me and I'm starting to feel a bit like she's leaving me behind, as if I never meant that much to her at all, which isn't really a very nice thing to do to your bestest* friend. I guess Rose has just got a lot on her mind, what with running away and all. I'm not really sure if she's thinking very well because I know from past experience that running away is a very hungry thing, even worse than still being at Church at one pm. I think God is starting to sound quite mean really too. I'm glad I stole his dollar!

What I read next pretty much confirms what I've suspected.

Monday Twenty First July

Dear Diary,

I have spoken with Thomas and he has sworn me his undying love. He assures me that there is nothing between him and Emily and he has cabled his uncle this very day to ask if he could come early and bring his new bride. Of course Father would never allow a marriage to go ahead but Thomas is sure that if we were to run away together then somewhere we could arrange a marriage, even if we have to lie about our ages. Thomas says that even before the marriage I must wear a ring so that his uncle's family will not know

(This word was probably made up by someone's little brother. – G.B.)*

that our child is conceived out of wedlock. It seems that we must add another lie to those we must already tell however I have agreed with Thomas that it is for the best. He really is a most good and honourable man and I feel at least sure that he will take care of me and our child. But oh what I have lost and poor Father when he finds his precious virtuous daughter run away, but better this than the disgrace should I remain behind. And I know heaven will never hold one such as me. May I cling to life always lest I descend to the depths of hell for eternity. My dear diary I am quite overcome.

Tuesday Fifth August

Dear Diary,

We leave tomorrow. It is all arranged. God have mercy!

Rose only wrote one more page after this, and it's pretty much the saddest thing I've ever read in my life (not that my life has really been that long so far but I really do hope I never hear anything sadder). I've learnt a lot more about things since I read this last entry, and I know stuff doesn't always work out the way we plan, and I also know that when bad things happen to people it can either make them better and stronger or make them nasty and mean, and that it's really up to you which you'll chose to be. I imagined Rose to be Beautiful and strong and always kind but I also knew that people could end up like Nan, bitter and nasty and hating her own flesh and blood. I guess it's really up to us to make the best of ourselves and not be lessened by the things that happen in our lives, and maybe, although I'm really still not sure, God will help us with

this just a little bit as well. Anyway, here's what Rose wrote and I warn you, have a few tissues ready because it's going to make you cry:

Friday Twenty Sixth September,

Oh my dearest Thomas, you are lost. I have only memories now, and no hope to join you in your sainted place in heaven. If only I had known, when you left home this Monday morning, that you would not return, I would have held tight to you and never let you leave. How can I live this long life without you at my side? I can promise you only that I will dedicate myself to bringing up this child in my womb, this last part of you in this world. You were a greater man than I could ever have believed. I have read over and over the words I wrote about you in this diary, some not very nice, and wish instead that I had written of every wonderful thing you did. Your uncle and aunt have been so kind and have told me I and the child may stay here with them for as long as we wish. They have made me part of the family and for that I am truly grateful. My only fear is that they will find that we were never married so I have determined that I must hide this diary somewhere it will never be found (For I cannot bring myself to destroy the only record of our love and your hopes for our child). My final promise to you, my dearest Thomas, is that I will give every part of myself to our child and that I will never allow her (for I am certain she will be a girl) to make the mistakes that have so cruelly destroyed our own lives. May there be a curse on anyone who harms even a hair on her head.

Goodbye my dearest Thomas, I will love you forever!

Your only Rose.

It was less than a month later, at Nan's funeral, when I heard Rose's name again. You see, I'd never known Nan's real name. She'd always just been Nan to us. It was a couple of years after that, looking at old birth records for our family tree, that I found that Nan had refused to allow Dad to be known as a Bradbury. Funny but until then I'd never thought there to be anything unusual about our family name.

We call her Auntie Emily now, although she's too old to be just an Aunty and anyway she isn't even related but it turns out that she and Nan made up many years later, after Nan's Mum and Dad had died and when Emily was visiting the city, and they only met up by chance and Nan had tried to hurry away but Auntie Emily had recognised her and had bailed her up right there on the street. She'd never told anyone what she knew about Nan not being married to Thomas either and I guess for that she turned out to be quite a good friend after all.

What's even better is that after the funeral when I showed Mum and Dad the diary and told them about the photo lost in the wall, Dad pulled some more of the wall apart and found a whole lot more stuff which had belonged to Nan and to Thomas and also a letter written by Nan addressed to him. It looked like it had been there for quite a while, as if Nan had written it and then changed her mind, and after Dad read it he wouldn't show it to anyone, not even Mum I think, but after that I do know he never again slapped anyone around when he was drinking so whatever was in it did him some good I'm

sure. We also found the photo of Nan and Emily and I know Aunty Emily kept it in a small silver frame on her mantelpiece until three days after her own funeral when her step daughter came to pack all her stuff away.

That's about all I know about Nan and my friend Rose who I could have known so much better but never did. You can visit her down at the cemetery though. Hers is the brand new grave stone right in amongst all the old crumbling ones. Right next to one where you can just make out the name Thomas and another that says 'Philipa Bradbury, Much loved daughter of Rose Audrey and the late Thomas, and mother of Anthony Curse.'