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Opening extract from

Goose: A Renee & Flo Novel

Written by

Dawn O'Porter

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Never Give Up on the Good Times

Renée

'Don't spend all that lunch money on sausage rolls!' yells Aunty Jo as I leave the house and walk to my car, my jacket hanging over my right shoulder. My hair is wet, my toothbrush is hanging out of my mouth and I'm holding my skirt up with my hand because I didn't have time to zip it up properly. My other hand is holding my car keys, my bag and a strawberry Pop Tart. As usual, I am really late for school.

I open the door of my Fiat 126 and throw everything except my toothbrush onto the passenger seat. Then, still holding up my unzipped skirt, I open the boot and pour into the engine the contents of the bottle of green anti-freeze that I left under my back wheel when I got home last night. When the bottle is empty I slam the boot shut, spit toothpaste into the hedge, get into my car, push in my Spice Girls tape and set off for

school. It's a lovely sunny April day.

I got my car for twenty-five quid off a friend of Aunty Jo's who won the local lottery and bought a BMW. If I won the lottery I would probably buy a BMW too, but there is no way I would sell my Fiat. It's falling apart, the brakes barely work so I have to slow down using my gears, and when it's cold I have to make sure I park on a hill so I can jump-start it. But I love that car with all my heart. It's so cute and teeny-tiny. Smaller than a Mini. I did once get six people in it from school, though, and drove us all to town. I had a foot in my face the whole way, but it was fun. And that is what I love about my little car: it's funny. It makes people laugh. Anyone who gets in it knows they are going to have a good time. It's fast too – I reached 55mph on the coast road last week. And even though it pumps out green anti-freeze and needs refilling every twenty minutes, you can actually get a long way on the island of Guernsey in that time.

When I arrive at school the car park is full, but as usual my best friend Flo has parked her car slightly over the line so that only my teeny-tiny one can fit in the space next to it. I park up and adjust my rear-view mirror so I can see my face. I scramble around in my glove box to find some black eye liner, draw once around both eyes, tie my hair into a pony tail, zip up my bag and get out.

I shudder as I walk past Flo's car. It's her brother Julian's old car, the same car I lost my virginity to him in two years ago. I've been in the car since then – Flo learned to drive a few months before me so she'd pick me up in it, but it always feels awkward, because what happened between me and Julian nearly split

me and Flo up. Sleeping with – and I'm sure that expression was invented by parents so they never have to actually use the word sex – Flo's brother is the stupidest thing I have ever done, and even though she has forgiven me for it we don't talk about my virginity because it involved me lying to Flo and really hurting her. It's the elephant in the room. Though at the time it felt like there was an elephant in my pants.

Flo

I don't like being in the common room on my own. It's really intimidating. Renée and I only joined the grammar school last year, and the girls who were already here gave us a bit of a hard time at the beginning. I think they felt like they owned the boys in their year and then we came along and the boys were interested to see what we were all about. It is better now than it was in the Lower Sixth, but when I am in the common room on my own I still feel like they're all making spastic faces behind my back because they know that I'm a virgin.

'How late am I?' says Renée, making her usual grand entrance as she kicks the door open. She drops her bag on the floor and gives me a hug. 'Thanks for saving me my spot.'

I hug her back. 'Thank God you're here. This room gives me the fear so badly.'

Renée's eyes narrow. 'Has someone said something to you? Who? What did they say?' She jumps into a ninja pose.

We both laugh. Sometimes I wonder if Renée actually enjoys people picking on me so she can stick up for me and have a

go at them. She's all about being the protective best friend.

We had to really stick together when we first started here. We felt like we were lost among the huge number of people in our year. At Tudor Falls School for Girls there were only thirty-five of us – here there are nearly 150. At first we were in our little bubble, just so happy to be together that we barely noticed anyone else, but when we did, it felt a bit overwhelming.

'No,' I say. 'No one said anything. But that doesn't stop me thinking they do, does it?'

'You're so paranoid, Flo,' Renée says, ruffling my hair like I am a little child. 'How many times do I have to tell you that you have me now. Who cares what anyone else thinks?'

I get my books out of my locker and smile. She's right, I shouldn't care. But I am plagued with insecurity. It was drummed into me over years of being teased by Sally de Putron that I'm square and not good enough. Sally might not be around me any more, but the constant jibing I had from her means that I presume the worst of people's feelings towards me at all times. Life would be much easier if I was more like Renée. Having said that, she *does* care about what people think of her – she is just better at hiding it.

'I can't believe the exams start in six weeks,' I say to Renée. 'It feels like ages since we filled out our UCAS forms. I remember watching you walk away to the post office thinking we had years until we had to think about A levels and here we are, about to do them. I really hope we both go to Nottingham. It looks fun there. Me at the uni, you at the polytechnic . . . That worked out really well, you still being able to do English even though you failed so many GCSEs . . . Renée?' I nudge

her. 'Renée, are you listening? Are you getting excited about going to Nottingham?'

'Urgh,' Renée sighs. 'I don't know. I only applied to do English so I can read books, but there is so much writing you have to do. The idea of writing even more essays when I leave here is not how I want to spend my first few years of freedom . . . ' She shakes her head. 'I dunno. I've gone off the idea, to be honest.'

I stare at my best friend, confused. 'Gone off the idea? You mean you don't want to do English? Maybe you could swap courses. I'm sure if you call them and explain you've had a change of heart they might consider you for something else. What about Classics? Or Cookery? You love food.'

'It's not the course, it's going on to study at all. I just don't think I want to spend another three years doing schoolwork.'

I feel panicky. 'But . . . what about us, Renée? What about our plan? That we would go somewhere where I could go to the uni, you could go to the poly, and we would be in the same city so we could live with each other and go away together?'

'I just don't think we should worry about what each other does. We should just do what we want,' she says, resiliently.

I watch her stuff clothes and packets of crisps into her locker and then try to push the door shut with her shoulder. She doesn't seem at all fazed by what she has just said. I feel a tingling in my nose, which means I am going to cry. Please, no.

'You mean you don't want to go to uni with me, like we said?' I ask, my voice unnecessarily high pitched.

'No, I don't mean that. I just mean if it doesn't work out then we shouldn't let it stop us doing what we want to do.

We can still see each other, go stay with each other, plan good weekends, that sort of thing. Just don't worry about it. You've been waiting to get off Guernsey most of your life – you can't let my choices hold you back from going where you want to go,' Renée says, like the thought of us splitting up isn't hideously awful.

'Don't worry, I won't,' I say. Hurt, and with a nose full of that annoying runny snot that comes with tears. I manage to sniff it all back up, which sounds disgusting and makes me feel embarrassed. 'It doesn't matter.'

Renée grabs my arm and smiles. 'It really doesn't. We'll work it out. Come on, I'll walk you to your RS lesson. I've got Classical Civilisation. Because learning about gods from a billion years ago who probably didn't even exist is just what every girl needs to arm her against the challenges of the modern world!'

We walk together down the corridor. Renée talks about what she plans to have for lunch and she doesn't seem to notice that I say nothing at all.

I feel nervous, and like everything is about to change.