Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

If I Stay

Written by Gayle Forman

Published by Black Swan,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

All text is copyright © Gayle Forman, 2009

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

If I Stay

GAYLE FORMAN

DOUBLEDAY

IF I STAY
A DOUBLEDAY BOOK (hardback) 978 0 385 61620 1
(trade paperback) 978 0 385 61621 8

First published in the United States by Dutton Books,
a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Published in Great Britain by Doubleday,
an imprint of Random House Children's Books
A Random House Group Company

This edition published 2009

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Gayle Forman, 2009

The right of Gayle Forman to be identified as the author of this work has
been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the
leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that are printed on
Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement
policy can be found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment



'Waiting for Vengeance' copyright © Oswald Five-O, 1996,
from *Serenade* (Grinning Idiot Records)

Typeset in 12/20pt Berkeley by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd

RANDOM HOUSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA

www.**kids**at**randomhouse**.co.uk
www.**rbooks**.co.uk

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited
can be found at: www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

THE RANDOM HOUSE GROUP Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

7:09 a.m.

Everyone thinks it was because of the snow. And in a way, I suppose that's true.

I wake up this morning to a thin blanket of white covering our front lawn. It isn't even an inch, but in this part of Oregon a slight dusting brings everything to a standstill as the one snowplow in the county gets busy clearing the roads. It is wet water that drops from the sky – and drops and drops and drops – not the frozen kind.

It is enough snow to cancel school. My little brother, Teddy, lets out a war whoop when Mom's AM radio announces the closures. 'Snow day!' he bellows. 'Dad, let's go make a snowman.'

My dad smiles and taps on his pipe. He started smoking one recently as part of this whole 1950s, *Father Knows Best* retro kick he is on. He also wears bow ties. I am never quite clear on whether all this is sartorial or sardonic – Dad's way of announcing that he used to be a punker but is now a

middle-school English teacher, or if becoming a teacher has actually turned my dad into this genuine throwback. But I like the smell of the pipe tobacco. It is sweet and smoky, and reminds me of winters and wood-stoves.

'You can make a valiant try,' Dad tells Teddy. 'But it's hardly sticking to the roads. Maybe you should consider a snow amoeba.'

I can tell Dad is happy. Barely an inch of snow means that all the schools in the county are closed, including my high school and the middle school where Dad works, so it's an unexpected day off for him, too. My mother, who works for a travel agent in town, clicks off the radio and pours herself a second cup of coffee. 'Well, if you lot are playing hooky today, no way I'm going to work. It's simply not right.' She picks up the telephone to call in. When she's done, she looks at us. 'Should I make breakfast?'

Dad and I guffaw at the same time. Mom makes cereal and toast. Dad's the cook in the family.

Pretending not to hear us, she reaches into the cabinet for a box of Bisquick. 'Please. How hard can it be? Who wants pancakes?'

'I do! I do!' Teddy yells. 'Can we have chocolate chips in them?'

'I don't see why not,' Mom replies.

'Woo-hoo!' Teddy yelps, waving his arms in the air.

'You have far too much energy for this early in the morning,' I tease. I turn to Mom. 'Maybe you shouldn't let Teddy drink so much coffee.'

'I've switched him to decaf,' Mom volleys back. 'He's just naturally exuberant.'

'As long as you're not switching *me* to decaf,' I say.

'That would be child abuse,' Dad says.

Mom hands me a steaming mug and the newspaper.

'There's a nice picture of your young man in there,' she says.

'Really? A picture?'

'Yep. It's about the most we've seen of him since summer,' Mom says, giving me a sidelong glance with her eyebrow arched, her version of a soul-searching stare.

'I know,' I say, and then without meaning to, I sigh. Adam's band, Shooting Star, is on an upward spiral, which, is a great thing – mostly.

'Ah, fame, wasted on the youth,' Dad says, but he's smiling. I know he's excited for Adam. Proud even.

I leaf through the newspaper to the calendar section. There's a small blurb about Shooting Star, with an even smaller picture of the four of them, next to a big article about Bikini and a huge picture of the band's lead singer: punk-rock-diva Brooke Vega. The bit about them basically says that local band Shooting Star is opening for Bikini on

the Portland leg of Bikini's national tour. It doesn't mention the even-bigger-to-me news that last night Shooting Star headlined at a club in Seattle and, according to the text Adam sent me at midnight, sold out the place.

'Are you going tonight?' Dad asks.

'I was planning to. It depends if they shut down the whole state on account of the snow.'

'It *is* approaching a blizzard,' Dad says, pointing to a single snowflake floating its way to the earth.

'I'm also supposed to rehearse with some pianist from the college that Professor Christie dug up.' Professor Christie, a retired music teacher at the university who I've been working with for the last few years, is always looking for victims for me to play with. 'Keep you sharp so you can show all those Juilliard snobs how it's really done,' she says.

I haven't gotten into Juilliard yet, but my audition went really well. The Bach suite and the Shostakovich had both flown out of me like never before, like my fingers were just an extension of the strings and bow. When I'd finished playing, panting, my legs shaking from pressing together so hard, one judge had clapped a little, which I guess doesn't happen very often. As I'd shuffled out, that same judge had told me that: 'it had been a long time since the school had seen an Oregon country girl'. Professor Christie had taken that to mean a guaranteed acceptance. I wasn't so sure that

was true. And I wasn't 100 per cent sure that I wanted it to be true. Just like with Shooting Star's meteoric rise, my admission to Juilliard – if it happens – will create certain complications, or, more accurately, would compound the complications that have already cropped up in the last few months.

'I need more coffee. Anyone else?' Mom asks, hovering over me with the ancient percolator.

I sniff the coffee, the rich, black, oily French roast we all prefer. The smell alone perks me up. 'I'm pondering going back to bed,' I say. 'My cello's at school, so I can't even practice.'

'Not practice? For twenty-four hours? Be still, my broken heart,' Mom says. Though she has acquired a taste for classical music over the years – 'it's like learning to appreciate a stinky cheese' – she's been a not-always-delighted captive audience for many of my marathon rehearsals.

I hear a crash and a boom coming from upstairs. Teddy is pounding on his drum kit. It used to belong to Dad. Back when he'd played drums in a big-in-our-town, unknown-anywhere-else band, back when he'd worked at a record store.

Dad grins at Teddy's noise, and seeing that, I feel a familiar pang. I know it's silly but I have always wondered if Dad is

disappointed that I didn't become a rock chick. I'd meant to. Then, in third grade, I'd wandered over to the cello in music class – it looked almost human to me. It looked like if you played it, it would tell you secrets, so I started playing. It's been almost ten years now and I haven't stopped.

'So much for going back to sleep,' Mom yells over Teddy's noise.

'What do you know, the snow's already melting.' Dad says, puffing on his pipe. I go to the back door and peek outside. A patch of sunlight has broken through the clouds, and I can hear the hiss of the ice melting. I close the door and go back to the table.

'I think the county overreacted,' I say.

'Maybe. But they can't un-cancel school. Horse is already out of the barn, and I already called in for the day off,' Mom says.

'Indeed. But we might take advantage of this unexpected boon and go somewhere,' Dad says. 'Take a drive. Visit Henry and Willow.' Henry and Willow are a couple of Mom and Dad's old music friends who'd also had a kid and decided to start behaving like grown-ups. They live in a big old farmhouse. Henry does Web stuff from the barn they converted into a home office and Willow works at a nearby hospital. They have a baby girl. That's the real reason Mom and Dad want to go out there. Teddy having just turned eight and me

being seventeen means that we are long past giving off that sour-milk smell that makes adults melt.

'We can stop at BookBarn on the way back,' Mom says, as if to entice me. BookBarn is a giant, dusty old used-book store. In the back they keep a stash of twenty-five-cent classical records that nobody ever seems to buy except me. I keep a pile of them hidden under my bed. A collection of classical records is not the kind of thing you advertise.

I've shown them to Adam, but that was only after we'd already been together for five months. I'd expected him to laugh. He's such the cool guy with his pegged jeans and black low-tops, his effortlessly beat-up punk-rock tees and his subtle tattoos. He is so not the kind of guy to end up with someone like me. Which was why when I'd first spotted him watching me at the music studios at school two years ago, I'd been convinced he was making fun of me and I'd hidden from him. Anyhow, he hadn't laughed. It turned out he had a dusty collection of punk-rock records under his bed.

'We can also stop by Gran and Gramps for an early dinner,' Dad says, already reaching for the phone. 'We'll have you back in plenty of time to get to Portland,' he adds as he dials.

'I'm in,' I say. It isn't the lure of BookBarn, or the fact that Adam is on tour, or that my best friend, Kim, is busy doing

yearbook stuff. It isn't even that my cello is at school or that I could stay home and watch TV or sleep. I'd actually rather go off with my family. This is another thing you don't advertise about yourself, but Adam gets that, too.

'Teddy,' Dad calls. 'Get dressed. We're going on an adventure.'

Teddy finishes off his drum solo with a crash of cymbals. A moment later he's bounding into the kitchen fully dressed, as if he'd pulled on his clothes while careening down the steep wooden staircase of our drafty Victorian house. 'School's out for summer . . .' he sings.

'Alice Cooper?' Dad asks. 'Have we no standards? At least sing the Ramones.'

'School's out for ever,' Teddy sings over Dad's protests.

'Ever the optimist,' I say.

Mom laughs. She puts a plate of slightly charred pancakes down on the kitchen table. 'Eat up, family.'

8:17 a.m.

We pile into the car, a rusting Buick that was already old when Gran gave it to us after Teddy was born. Mom and Dad offer to let me drive, but I say no. Dad slips behind the wheel. He likes to drive now. He'd stubbornly refused to get

a license for years, insisting on riding his bike everywhere. Back when he played music, his unwillingness to drive meant that his bandmates were the ones stuck behind the wheel on tours. They used to roll their eyes at him. Mom had done more than that. She'd pestered, cajoled, and sometimes yelled at Dad to get a license, but he'd insisted that he preferred pedal power. 'Well, then you better get to work on building a bike that can hold a family of three and keep us dry when it rains,' she'd demanded. To which Dad always had laughed and said that he'd get on that.

But when Mom had gotten pregnant with Teddy, she'd put her foot down. Enough, she said. Dad seemed to understand that something had changed. He'd stopped arguing and had gotten a driver's license. He'd also gone back to school to get his teaching certificate. I guess it was OK to be in arrested development with one kid. But with two, time to grow up. Time to start wearing a bow tie.

He has one on this morning, along with a flecked sport coat and vintage wingtips. 'Dressed for the snow, I see,' I say.

'I'm like the post office,' Dad replies, scraping the snow off the car with one of Teddy's plastic dinosaurs that are scattered on the lawn. 'Neither sleet nor rain nor a half inch of snow will compel me to dress like a lumberjack.'

'Hey, my relatives were lumberjacks,' Mom warns. 'No making fun of the white-trash woodsmen.'

'Wouldn't dream of it,' Dad replies. 'Just making stylistic contrasts.'

Dad has to turn the ignition over a few times before the car chokes to life. As usual, there is a battle for stereo dominance. Mom wants the news. Dad wants Frank Sinatra. Teddy wants SpongeBob SquarePants. I want the classical-music station, but recognizing that I'm the only classical fan in the family, I am willing to compromise with Shooting Star.

Dad brokers the deal. 'Seeing as we're missing school today, we ought to listen to the news for a while so we don't become ignoramuses—'

'I believe that's ignoramusi,' Mom says.

Dad rolls his eyes and clasps his hand over Mom's and clears his throat in that schoolteachery way of his. 'As I was saying, the news first, and then when the news is over, the classical station. Teddy, we will not torture you with that. You can use the Discman,' Dad says, starting to disconnect the portable player he's rigged to the car radio. 'But you are not allowed to play to Alice Cooper in my car. I forbid it.' Dad reaches into the glove box to examine what's inside. 'How about Jonathan Richman?'

'I want SpongeBob. It's in the machine,' Teddy shouts, bouncing up and down and pointing to the Discman. The chocolate-chip pancakes dowsed in syrup have clearly only enhanced his hyper excitement.

'Son, you break my heart,' Dad jokes. Both Teddy and I were raised on the goofy tunes of Jonathan Richman, who is Mom and Dad's musical patron saint.

Once the musical selections have been made, we are off. The road has some patches of snow, but mostly it's just wet. But this is Oregon. The roads are always wet. Mom used to joke that it was when the road was dry that people ran into trouble. 'They get cocky, throw caution to the wind, drive like assholes. The cops have a field day doling out speeding tickets.'

I lean my head against the car window, watching the scenery zip by, a tableau of dark-green fir trees dotted with snow, wispy strands of white fog, and heavy gray storm clouds up above. It's so warm in the car that the windows keep fogging up, and I draw little squiggles in the condensation.

When the news is over, we turn to the classical station. I hear the first few bars of Beethoven's Cello Sonata no. 3, which was the very piece I was supposed to be working on this afternoon. It feels like some kind of cosmic coincidence. I concentrate on the notes, imagining myself playing, feeling grateful for this chance to practice, happy to be in a warm car with my sonata and my family. I close my eyes.

You wouldn't expect the radio to work afterward. But it does.

The car is eviscerated. The impact of a four-ton pickup truck going sixty miles an hour plowing straight into the passenger side had the force of an atom bomb. It tore off the doors, sent the front-side passenger seat through the driver's-side window. It flipped the chassis, bouncing it across the road and ripped the engine apart as if it were no stronger than a spider web. It tossed wheels and hubcaps deep into the forest. It ignited bits of the gas tank, so that now tiny flames lap at the wet road.

And there was so much noise. A symphony of grinding, a chorus of popping, an aria of exploding, and finally, the sad clapping of hard metal cutting into soft trees. Then it went quiet, except for this: Beethoven's Cello Sonata no. 3, still playing. The car radio somehow still is attached to a battery and so Beethoven is broadcasting into the once-again tranquil February morning.

At first I figure everything is fine. For one, I can still hear the Beethoven. Then there's the fact that I am standing here in a ditch on the side of the road. When I look down, the jean skirt, cardigan sweater, and the black boots I put on this morning all look the same as they did when we left the house.

I climb up the embankment to get a better look at the car. It isn't even a car anymore. It's a metal skeleton, without seats, without passengers. Which means the rest of my

family must have been thrown from the car like me. I brush off my hands onto my skirt and walk into the road to find them.

I see Dad first. Even from several feet away, I can make out the protrusion of the pipe in his jacket pocket. 'Dad,' I call, but as I walk toward him, the pavement grows slick and there are gray chunks of what looks like cauliflower. I know what I'm seeing right away but it somehow does not immediately connect back to my father. What springs into my mind are those news reports about tornadoes or fires, how they'll ravage one house but leave the one next door intact. Pieces of my father's brain are on the asphalt. But his pipe is in his left breast pocket.

I find Mom next. There's almost no blood on her, but her lips are already blue and the whites of her eyes are completely red, like a ghoul from a low-budget monster movie. She seems totally unreal. And it is the sight of her looking like some preposterous zombie that sends a hummingbird of panic ricocheting through me.

I need to find Teddy! Where is he? I spin around, suddenly frantic, like the time I lost him for ten minutes at the grocery store. I'd been convinced he'd been kidnapped. Of course, it had turned out that he'd wandered over to inspect the candy aisle. When I found him, I hadn't been sure whether to hug him or yell at him.

I run back toward the ditch where I came from and I see a hand sticking out. 'Teddy! I'm right here!' I call. 'Reach up. I'll pull you out.' But when I get closer, I see the metal glint of a silver bracelet with tiny cello and guitar charms. Adam gave it to me for my seventeenth birthday. It's my bracelet. I was wearing it this morning. I look down at my wrist. I'm still wearing it now.

I edge closer and now I know that it's not Teddy lying there. It's me. The blood from my chest has seeped through my shirt, skirt and sweater, and is now pooling like paint drops on the virgin snow. One of my legs is askew, the skin and muscle peeled away so that I can see white streaks of bone. My eyes are closed, and my dark-brown hair is wet and rusty with blood.

I spin away. This isn't right. This cannot be happening. We are a family, going on a drive. This isn't real. I must have fallen asleep in the car. *No! Stop. Please stop. Please wake up!* I scream into the chilly air. It's cold. My breath should smoke. It doesn't. I stare down at my wrist, the one that looks fine, untouched by blood and gore, and I pinch as hard as I can.

I don't feel a thing.

I have had nightmares before – falling nightmares, playing- a-cello-recital-without-knowing-the-music nightmares, break-up-with-Adam nightmares – but I have always been

able to command myself to open my eyes, to lift my head from the pillow, to halt the horror movie playing behind my closed lids. I try again. *Wake up!* I scream. *Wake up! Wakeupwakeupwakeup!* But I can't. I don't.

Then I hear something. It's the music. I can still hear the music. So I concentrate on that. I finger the notes of Beethoven's Cello Sonata no. 3 with my hands, as I often do when I listen to pieces I am working on. Adam calls it 'air cello.' He's always asking me if one day we can play a duet, him on air guitar, me on air cello. 'When we're done, we can thrash our air instruments,' he jokes. 'You know you want to.'

I play, just focusing on that, until the last bit of life in the car dies, and the music goes with it.

It isn't long after that the sirens come.

9:23 a.m.

Am I dead?

I actually have to ask myself this.

Am I dead?

At first it seemed obvious that I am. That the standing-here-watching part was temporary, an intermission before the bright light and the life-flashing-before-me business

that would transport me to wherever I'm going next.

Except the paramedics are here now, along with the police and the fire department. Someone has put a sheet over my father. And a fireman is zipping Mom up into a plastic bag. I hear him discuss her with another firefighter, who looks like he can't be more than eighteen. The older one explains to the rookie that Mom was probably hit first and killed instantly, explaining the lack of blood. 'Immediate cardiac arrest,' he says. 'When your heart can't pump blood, you don't really bleed. You seep.'

I can't think about that, about Mom seeping. So instead I think how fitting it is that she was hit first, that she was the one to buffer us from the blow. It wasn't her choice, obviously, but it was her way.

But am I dead? The me who is lying on the edge of the road, my leg hanging down into the gulley, is surrounded by a team of men and women who are performing frantic ablutions over me and plugging my veins with I do not know what. I'm half naked, the paramedics having ripped open the top of my shirt. One of my breasts is exposed. Embarrassed, I look away.

The police have lit flares along the perimeter of the scene and are instructing cars in either direction to turn back, the road is closed. The police politely offer alternate routes, back roads that will take people where they need to be.