



Raven Hearts

Don't miss these other brilliant books by Fiona Dunbar:

The Kitty Slade series

Divine Freaks

Fire and Roses

Venus Rocks

*The Lulu Baker trilogy,
now filmed as Jinx for the BBC*

The Truth Cookie

Cupid Cakes

Chocolate Wishes

The Silk Sisters trilogy

Pink Chameleon

Blue Gene Baby

Tiger-lily Gold

Plus the fantastic novel

Toonhead

For news, competitions and more, check out:

www.fionadunbar.com

www.orchardbooks.co.uk

Raven Hearts

fiona dunbar



ORCHARD



ORCHARD BOOKS
338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH
Orchard Books Australia
Level 17/207 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

First published in the UK in 2012 by Orchard Books

ISBN 978 1 40830 931 5

Text © Fiona Dunbar 2012

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

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

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain

Orchard Books is a division of Hachette Children's Books,
an Hachette UK company.

www.hachette.co.uk





For Stuart, Jo-Anne, Gabby and Ross







Archie Booth

DVDs.

That's what you need, and plenty of them, if you're going to survive the hell that is the entire length of the M3 motorway, plus most of the M1, plus sizeable chunks of other, more rubbish roads. In a hulking great Hippo of a camper van that only ever reaches about fifty-five miles an hour.

Oh, and don't let your brother be in charge of DVD selection. Trust me: I speak from experience. Somehow I didn't get to be around when the Big Road Trip DVD collection was put together, so while there *was* stuff I liked from way back, none of my recent faves were there. No vampires, no rom-coms. Flossie seemed to have snuck some of hers in, I noticed, but she was the *only* one who liked *High School Musical*.

The Big Road Trip, incidentally, was basically our life

now. The Hippo was our home, Maro (our grandmother) was our driver and teacher, and we were free to go where we wanted. No fixed abode, no school. Great, huh? Well...yes and no.

Sam pulled out a Harry Potter film.

'Yay!' said Flossie.

I groaned. 'You know what? I'm not in the mood.'

'Kitty! Not in the mood? How can you not be in the mood for Harry Potter?' said Sam.

I sighed. 'Too many ghosts.'

'Uh?' protested Flossie. 'But there's also wizards and magic, and—'

'And ghosts,' I said. 'Look, I get enough of that stuff in real life; I could use a break, OK?'

Flossie folded her arms tightly. 'Not fair!'

Ha! Not fair? Was it fair on *me* that I was stuck seeing dead people all over the place, whether I liked it or not? But no way was Flossie ever going to understand that, not in a million years...

'Come on,' I said, gesturing to Sam. 'There must be something else.'

Nothing seemed to fit the bill. Finally, Sam said, 'OK: is creepy allowed, as long as there's no ghosts?'

'We-ell...'

'Come on; you'll be fine with this,' he said, pulling

out his Alfred Hitchcock collection. Sam's a total Alfred Hitchcock geek. I secretly don't mind some of those movies, but I so wouldn't tell him that; he'd never shut up about it. Seriously.

Flossie groaned loudly. 'Oh, not *old* movies.'

'Just go with it,' insisted Sam, putting on a film called *The Birds*.

'Is it black-and-white?' asked Flossie.

'No.'

'Oh, all right.'

The Birds is about this woman who gets attacked by a seagull out on some remote island; next thing you know, she's convalescing, then hanging out full-time... Anyway, soon it starts getting weird, and the birds start ganging up on the humans, whole flocks of them. Then they're attacking people all over the place, and nobody knows why. The end gets cheesy though, because that's when the special effects come in. Fail! Well, it was made in 1963. That's not just pre-CGI, that's pre-just-about-everything. Sam wasn't pleased when me and Flossie just laughed.

'Oh you kids, you're so hard to please,' Maro called back from the driving seat. 'I remember being scared stiff of that film!'

'The trouble with *them* is, they can't use their imaginations,' said Sam.

'Sam?' I said.

'Yeah?'

'Stop being a pompous ar—'

'Language!' snapped Maro.

'Why d'you s'pose they made it about birds,' said Flossie, 'and not, like, swarms of bees or something?'

'Because that *would* be cheesy,' said Sam.

'Plus, I've got to admit, birds are kind of creepy,' I said.

'Well, you know, in art, they symbolise departed souls,' said Maro.

'What, you mean, like, ghosts?' said Flossie.

'Yes: ghosts, spirits.'

'So was that a ghost story then?'

'No, of course not,' said Sam. 'It's about *birds*.'

'How do you know they're not *symbolising* dead people?' I said. 'Use your imagination, *Sam*.'

He made a rude gesture at me.

After that I zizzed off, and dreamt I was being pursued by a gang of massive human-sized crows – which, trust me, was a hell of a lot scarier and less silly than it sounds. So much for not watching anything spooky. I needed to get Maro down to the shops pdq next time we were in a town, and pick some movies *I* wanted.

*

'Why are people staring at us?' I asked, as we rumbled over towards our pitch at the caravan park. So far we'd mostly been parking the Hippo in people's driveways and stuff. But here in Yorkshire, where we were staying for a while on our way up to Scotland, we didn't really know anybody. Which is why we wound up here at the Adlington Beck Caravan Park, being stared at.

'They're just curious,' said Maro.

'Nosy, more like,' said Sam.

'Staring is rude,' said Flossie.

'It's just human nature,' said Maro. 'You'd be curious, too. Anyway, you want people to be interested, don't you? Maybe we'll make some new friends.'

I stared out at the grey-haired couple in the zip-up cardies who were tending this completely OTT rockery garden they had beside their caravan, crammed with statuettes. 'Uh-huh...*right*.'

'Of course there may not be any kids here, it being term-time,' said Maro, cheerfully. 'But that needn't matter!'

'*Ri-i-ight*,' I said.

Hadn't thought of that. Now it finally dawned on me that not only would kids not be around during school hours; they just wouldn't be here, period. Because families don't hang out at caravan parks unless they're on holiday, and of course they don't take holidays

during term-time. Urgh. This was going to be so dull. What was more, it looked like any minute it was going to pelt down with rain.

A man came over and guided us to our pitch. 'I'll go and fetch Brian for yer,' he said, and disappeared. Maro parked on the pitch, with all the usual faffing that entails. Lurching back and forth, back and forth, crunching gears, stalling. Embarrassing. I could just *feel* all those people staring, thinking, *Who's this idiot?*

And what was the first thing I saw when we got out? A ruddy great scary black bird, perched on the fence opposite. I froze. 'Whoah!'

'Oh look,' said Maro. 'A raven!'

Sam was delighted. 'Whoo, creepy!' he said. 'Next thing you know, they'll all be lining up along here, and—'

'Yeah, yeah,' I said. The raven cocked its head to one side and stared at me with its little black beady eye. 'For God's sake, even the *birds* stare at you round here! What is it with this place?'

'Shh!' hissed Sam. 'Don't be so rude!'

I looked around. 'Chill out! Nobody heard. It's just...' I looked at the raven again. Still, it held its gaze. 'Yeah, it's creepy.'

The raven cocked its head the other way, cawed loudly, then flapped away.

'It's just a harmless bird, *Kitaki-mou*,' said Maro. 'It's not going to attack you or anything.' She staggered out into the clearing beside the pitch and started doing these weird stretches. 'Ooh...ooh...ah!'

'What are you *doing*?' I asked.

'Ooh...long drive, sweetie, long drive...aah, my joints!' She doubled over, clasped her hands behind her and swung them up in the air. 'Oh, hello!' she said from between her legs, blood collected in her raspberry-coloured upside-down face, white hair dangling.

I looked over to see a tall man standing nearby, holding a clipboard. Brian, no doubt. 'Mrs...Slade?' he said, peering sideways at her.

Me, Sam and Floss all looked at each other, cringing with embarrassment.

'Ooh, ah! Yes!' said Maro, straightening herself out, and losing her balance in the process.

Brian stepped forward and reached out to steady her. 'Ha ha ha, there you go...all right?'

Maro was hooting with laughter at this point, and swearing in Greek. '*Oh, po po, ti messi mou*, my aching back!'

Mr and Mrs Zip-up Cardie stood there with their secateurs, staring. The cupid statuette stared. Nearby, a large ceramic frog stared, bug-eyed. Several of our

other new neighbours were staring, too.

'I'm Brian,' said the man, 'we spoke on the phone.'

We spork on the phorn. I'd have to get used to this accent.

'Ah yes,' said Maro. She introduced us, then gazed around. 'What a lovely place you have here; charming. And the view! Look, kids! Vista!'

Like we hadn't noticed already. It *was* a lovely spot; lush green hills in every direction, dotted with sheep and bordered with the same craggy dry-stone walls we'd been seeing all over the place.

'So that's Ilkley Moor?' said Maro, gesturing to the hills.

'No, that's all farmland you see there,' said Brian. 'The moor's just out that way, to the south. Have you not been here before?'

'No, never.'

'Ah, it's one of the loveliest parts of the country, this,' said Brian, proudly. 'Beautiful...mysterious... a wilderness. "Solid rock deeper than any sea": Ted Hughes.' He paused for us to be all impressed. 'Like all beautiful things, it's also deadly,' he added gravely.

'It is? They are?' said Maro.

Brian suddenly lightened up. 'Oh, only if you don't take proper precautions! You'd be amazed at some

people. So I always warn newcomers, like. If you're heading right into the heart of the moor, you take a good map, and provisions, you check the forecast...all common sense, really.'

'Oh, don't worry...we're sensible, aren't we, kids?' said Maro.

'Oh, *dead* sensible,' I said.

The next day, I met some of those dead *non*-sensible types.

Uninspiring though the caravan park was, we had at least wanted to go for a wander round it – but then it had begun to pour with rain. So having already been stuck in the Hippo for most of the day, we were cooped up again with frozen pizza and the telly. Even the campsite's broadband wasn't working, which totally sucked.

By the next morning, we were all *desperate* to get out, so we caught a bus to the moor.

Flossie wasn't inspired. She sat slumped next to me on the bus. 'I think the moor sounds *boring*,' she moaned. 'I mean, what *is* a moor? It's just grass, isn't it? Big old load of grass. Nothing fun in it. Boring.'

'Flossie!' said Sam. 'There's much more than that! Didn't you read your info sheets?'

‘Oh that, yeah,’ said Flossie. ‘I forgot: there’s rocks too. Rocks an’ grass.’

Maro chuckled. ‘Just you wait, *pethaki-mou*. It’s a bit more interesting than you make it sound—’

‘*Moor* interesting, geddit?’ said Sam poking Flossie from behind. ‘*Moor* interesting!’

I rolled my eyes. ‘Yup, got it, Sam.’

Maro, oblivious, was meanwhile rabbiting on about all the errands and stuff she had to do. ‘...So today’s just a short walk anyway. Ah, look, we’re right on the edge of it now. See?’

Flossie looked unimpressed. ‘And ferns. Lots of ferns.’

When we got off the bus, we were way up high, with wide-open space in every direction. Flossie became mildly more interested as we got closer to some rocks which, it soon became clear, were actually these whacking great cliffs. One part had a big hunk of rock leaning out from it, and there was another, smaller one like it that had fallen down at some point. These were called the Cow and Calf. Climbing the path towards the cliffs, you could see there was an opening, and the path led right through the gap. Flossie, now totally excited, ran up and into the opening. We all followed, and found ourselves surrounded on three sides by these massive

rock crags, high as office blocks.

'Whoah!' said Sam.

'This is sooo cool!' said Flossie.

'Yup: haunted, too,' I said, gazing around at the several misshapen ghosts that were moping about the place.

'Yeah?'

'Uh-huh.'

'Says here, it's a very popular place for rock climbers,' said Maro, reading from her guidebook.

'Yeah, that figures,' I said. 'I guess some of them didn't actually know what the hell they were doing, so then...splat.'

We went back out and headed to the top the safe way. There were two paths: the easy one – gently sloping, winding around the hill – and the steep one, which was shorter and more direct, but also more challenging. Floss kept Maro company going round the long way, while Sam and I scrambled up the rocky path. Sam, annoyingly, got to the top way before me. Well, I had a shoelace issue. I'm actually a really good climber.

Anyway, the point is, by the time I got to the top, I was on my own for a bit. I gazed down into the massive rocky well, then felt giddy, so I stepped

back. Then suddenly I felt this huge WHOOSH of cold air, and there in front of me stood a woman in a turquoise coat.

She came right up to me and grabbed my arm with her ice-cold hand. Intense gaze, deep-set eyes a bit too close together. Quite old, maybe seventy-something. She wore one of those headscarves they used to wear in the 1960s. Powdery face, red lipstick. Looked like an extra out of *The Birds*, actually. Said she was looking for her boy, Archie Booth. 'Have you seen him?' she asked.

Typical ghost; looking for some other dead person. Grandson, I supposed.

I glanced at the ghosts down below, thinking, surely he couldn't be one of them? She must have been able to see them herself. 'What does he look like?' I asked.

'Oh, he's a strapping lad, is our Archie,' she said. 'He...he loves his puds. I mean, he *did*, before... Oooh!' She chewed the knuckles of her gloved hand, then dabbed at her eyes with a hanky and sniffed. 'He's a little on the heavy side, I suppose. Last seen out here, on t' moor. And I'm that worried he'll perish, poor baby!' And then she really went off on one, wailing her heart out.

Blimey, I thought. *How to break it to her?*

Well, I figured I'd just go along with it, act as if there

was something I could do. 'Who was he with at the time?' I asked.

'Oh, he wasn't *with* anybody; he was alone.'

'*Alone?* But—'

'I know, I know...I've gone over and over it in my mind, wishing, wishing...'

The kid's mother must have been really neglectful, I thought. All the same, people don't usually just disappear into thin air. I cleared my throat. 'Well, um...did...I mean, *does* he like rock climbing?'

She shook her head. 'Oh no, he'd never do that.'

'OK...' I gazed down at the ghosts below; not a single one was overweight. Which didn't mean Archie couldn't have had an accident somewhere on the moor, of course – only you'd think he'd have been found, in that case.

Then the woman started to fade. 'Please: you must help me find him...please!'

'Well, I'll...I'll try.'

Again she grabbed my arm in her icy grip. 'You promise, now?' Man, she was intense!

'Look, I...' I sighed. 'OK, what was he wearing?'

'He was dressed warmly, at least.' She sniffed loudly. 'Yes, with his donkey jacket, his warm socks, his Doc Martens...they'd keep the worst of the cold out.' She

seemed desperate to find that reassuring...it was quite pathetic, really.

Now her spirit energy was waning; she faded some more.

‘And...how old was...*is* he?’ I asked, hurriedly.

But by now she had faded completely, so that was that.