

Chapter Three

One of the things I like best about our flat is that you can see just about anything from the window. You just need to know where to look.

I could always see the old man who slept on a bench in the park with no shoes on, and the delivery van that parked on the pavement to bring crates of milk to the little row of shops. I could even see the little grey bodies of the two thin dogs who walked behind their owner, in a line, every morning. I came to recognize different people and even knew what sort of time I would see them.

I always liked spotting new things, though. And things that you wouldn't be able to see if you walked past on the street but that only I could see, from high up. Did you know, for instance, that buses have numbers and letters on the top of them? They are painted so

large that I could read them from my window.

I didn't only look down, though. I liked to see what was happening in the sky too. I thought that the tiny little aeroplanes that moved across the sky resembled pencils sailing through the air. It didn't seem real to me that they were full of people. They looked so narrow and small up there.

'That's because they're far away, Ade,' a teacher told me once, when I said this.

I didn't reply that it wasn't that I didn't understand. It just amazed me that people could be so high up in the air, in just a little metal capsule with wings.

In those days, I thought that being high up in my tower was safe. There were the flats below mine and the flats below those ones and the ones below them, all holding me up. There was no chance that I could have dropped to the ground. But there was nothing to hold an aeroplane up.

Mum loved the view from our flat too.

'Just think, Ade. Some people would pay to see this but it's ours. All ours. Whenever we want it. All we need to do is look out of the window.'

We would sit together, side by side, watching the world go by, finding pictures in the clouds

in the sky. We used to do that all the time.

It's been weeks and weeks since that happened but I can still remember the last time exactly. I had come into the sitting room, swinging my school bag and humming a song that Gaia had heard on the radio and would sing under her breath all the time, without realizing it. I don't really like to sing out loud in front of anyone else, even my mum and Gaia. I usually just do it in my head, but I didn't think Mum would be there.

'That's beautiful, Ade. Come and sing to me.'

I looked up to see Mum sitting by the window. Her eyes looked a bit red and she was wearing a dress that I hadn't seen in a long time but for some reason made me think of bedtimes in the summer. The times when you go to bed and it is still light outside and you have the funny tiredness in your head that comes from playing in the sun all day.

'Sit with me. Tell me about your day.'

I dumped my bag on the floor and went to sit next to her. She rested her hand on my head, as if she was checking to see if I was ill.

'What did you do at school today?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing? Again? I see,' she said.

'What did you do today, Mum?'

She looked at me mischievously, her eyes twinkling.

'Today?' she said. 'Nothing.'

She laughed and gave me a little knock-knock on the head and went into the kitchen. She came back out holding a couple of bowlfuls of chocolate ice cream. 'Here you go, pet. Sometimes doing nothing can be tiring,' she said, handing me a spoon and a bowl.

It was funny, because when my mum gave me the ice cream, all I could think was: *Where did she get it from?*