

## Chapter Twenty-one

Most people were leaving.

I could see them going from my window.

There was a steady procession of people out on the pavements. They were carrying as much as they could, in brightly coloured bags, or dragging large suitcases behind them. All their belongings in the world.

I spent a long time checking through the line of people to see if I could see Gaia and her family among them.

I wondered if her dad had changed his mind and they were on their way to Brighton, right now, to her aunt's house.

Or if her parents were fighting. Not able to agree over what they were going to do and Gaia and her brothers trying not to hear the shouting through the thin walls.

I had no way of telling. We didn't have a

phone at my house. Mum had a mobile but I didn't know where she kept it.

I felt in my pocket for the map that Gaia had given me, and traced the numbered dots with my finger until I came to rest upon Gaia's drawing of her block. I missed her.

I tried to shake the thought from my head that I might never see her again but it kept returning over and over in my mind, making me feel sick and panicky. The only thing that calmed me was turning over the map that Gaia had made in my hands. It was my last piece of her. I didn't have any photographs, only the pictures in my head and the worn paper map I was holding.

I hoped that she had got out. I hoped that she had left her flat behind her and was far away from the piles of brick and rubble that made up our streets now. No one was safe in their homes any more. Bricks and walls and doors didn't protect you any longer.

Perhaps she was already there. In Brighton. Down by the sea. I'd only seen the sea once when we went on a trip to the beach in Year Two and it had scared me a bit. It was so vast, so unending, stretching on and on until it met the sky. Gaia had held my hand as we waded into the shallow

waters because I told her I was afraid, and she'd squeezed it tight as the first wave rolled in and splashed us right up to our waists. I screamed, I think, but I didn't feel as worried with Gaia beside me.

I wished I was with Gaia again. Perhaps I could have gone with her family to Brighton and escaped as well.

I knew it was a good idea to get out, but the problem was, I just couldn't go anywhere without Mum.