

Chapter Four

I should tell you a little bit about my mum. She's not like other mums in some ways. And in others, she definitely is.

She tells me to brush my teeth. Sometimes she reads to me just before I fall asleep. She has a beautiful face that tells people who haven't met her before that she is kind but also that she is funny. I think she has the loveliest smile I have ever seen. It's the kind that creeps up on you, and then before you know it her whole face is lit up by it and it beams down on you as well.

Mum's the one who came up with my name. I mean, I know that everyone's mum gives them their name, but when I was in Reception, there were two of us called Adeola and a fair few named Adesoye and Adeyemi and Adefemi, so my mum just said to call me Ade.

Add-ee.

'Nice and simple,' Mum said.

Everyone calls me that now. I think they've forgotten my full name.

Adeola feels a little bit alien even to me now. Only sometimes, Gaia says something like, 'Adeola, I wasn't finished talking, you know,' if she gets cross with me for interrupting and it takes me a second to realize that she's actually talking to me.

The thing with my mum is, she doesn't like going out of the flat much. She doesn't go out at all, actually. It's something that has made us change the way we do things so I've learned pretty much to get along with it.

I remember a time when she sat me down and had a big talk with me about being grown up now, which meant that I could walk to school by myself. Not long after that, she said I'd been so grown up that I could do the shopping that week and we wrote out a list together. Then came the day when she gave me her bank card.

'You are going to have to look all around you, Ade, and wait until there's no one about. If someone suddenly comes up to you, then you'll have to walk away and go back later. You understand?'

'Yes,' I said. Part of me knew that this was a little bit dangerous, that it wasn't something I was meant to do, but mostly I just felt that Mum was trusting me. It was a good feeling.

'So, tell me what you do. If there's no one around.'

'I put the card in the machine. And then I put the pin code in: 5-4-3-7. Then I press the button for cash and then I press the button for £50 and then I wait.'

'And then you take the money. Don't forget that part, Ade! The money will come through the little slot at the bottom. Then you come straight back to me.'

'I won't forget the money, Mum. You must think I'm really stupid!' I was just trying to make a joke but Mum looked at me strangely.

'Don't ever say that. I don't think you're stupid. Not one little bit. Don't let me catch you saying anything like that again, OK? You must never think you're stupid.'

I swallowed hard and looked away. Mum didn't usually talk to me like that. It was like she was talking right up close into my face.

Getting the money from the cash machine was easy enough, though. I did exactly as Mum

told me and I never had any problems. I wouldn't say I enjoyed it. I always felt quite worried walking home in case something silly happened, like the wind blew the money out of my hand or something. The notes always felt silky and smooth in my hand at first, but by the time I'd made it back to the tower, they were crumpled and warm from being clenched in my sweaty palm. But I felt something like pride, something like happiness, when I delivered the money to Mum.

'Good boy, Ade,' Mum said the first time I got back from the cash point, and she smiled at me. It was a small, quick one, her lips drawing upwards hurriedly, but it made my heart swell up. I hadn't seen Mum smile in a long time.

'Right, now, take this.' She shoved one of the crumpled bank notes back into my hand. 'And here's a list. Hurry back.'

I looked down at Mum's scrawled handwriting on the back of an old envelope. *Large milk, white bread, spag hoops, Frosties.*

She was looking at me so expectantly and I knew she wasn't asking me, she was telling me. *Take this. Hurry back.* So I went, and when I dumped the blue-and-white striped bag full of

shopping on the floor, Mum rewarded me with an even longer smile and I knew that I would do anything to make her smile again.

It seemed to start slowly with the not-walking-me-to-school and the not-going-shopping and the not-getting-money, and then, before I knew it, I realized I hadn't seen Mum leave the flat for a couple of months. After that, Mum asked me to make dinner one night, and the night after that and the night after that. It was only heating a tin of something up in a pan and toasting a few pieces of bread. I didn't mind doing it.

But I decided to tell Gaia about it. I wanted to find out if her mum was asking her to do the same sort of things.

I can remember exactly the day I told Gaia.

It was the day the rain stopped falling.

The day the first building fell.