

## Chapter Seven

I knew what I needed to do to make it easier for Mum, so I went back to doing all the things I did before.

Before I tried to make Mum come outside with me, I'd got really good at being quiet when I arrived home from school so I didn't wake her. I called it the Silence Game.

I had all sorts of tactics. One of the things I did was leave the hat off our whistling kettle when I boiled water for tea. Another was tiptoeing around the flat as quietly as I could, before I realized that I made a lot less noise if I just walked very carefully and slowly and spread my weight over the soles of my feet. That way I could stop any floorboards creaking.

I also made sure that I didn't flush the toilet after I'd used it. I know that sounds a little bit disgusting but I just put the lid down straight

away and it wasn't too bad. Then Mum flushed it when she got up.

Sometimes I would get a surprise and find something lying around that meant Mum must have left the flat that day. It didn't happen often but enough to make me excited every day that I might find a clue that she had managed to go outside. Once it was just that her shoes were a little bit wet on their soles. I used to check the bottoms of her shoes every day, you see. Sometimes it was something that was left out, that had not been there before. You would not believe how happy I felt when a single orange appeared on our sofa one day. Or how fantastically pleased I was when I found a newspaper sitting on the kitchen table. The time gaps in between finding things like that were getting longer and longer but it still gave me a lot of hope.

Then there were the precious few days when Mum really would surprise me. She would be awake when I came home from school. Sometimes she had even washed her face and put lipstick on. Then she would blow me away by casually producing something that hadn't come from any of my shopping trips, and that she

couldn't even have bought from one of the shops close to the flat.

The day she presented me with a bowl of chocolate ice cream set my mind racing. I knew she must have gone to the supermarket, because it was the only place you could get this particular flavour, which had bits of chocolate brownie and swirls of caramel in it. It was our favourite. Before Mum got hurt, we used to eat it all the time. 'Too much of the time!' Mum would laugh, in the old days, before patting the rounds of our bellies.

She could have quite easily just bought some chocolate or sweets from the nearby newsagent's, but she hadn't. She'd walked right past it and gone all the way down the road to buy our favourite chocolate ice cream. Chocolate ice cream for me. The ice cream said, *I'm getting better, Ade, I really am* – and you know what? It tasted all the better because of it.

There were no signs that she had left the flat the day after she'd tried to come shopping with me. Everything was lying untouched and silent when I got home that night.

I started playing the Silence Game and slowly walked over to the window ledge. I didn't make a sound.

I looked down on the city below me and found the spot where the old pub had fallen down.

I might only be saying this because I know what's happened since, but I thought I did notice some things that were a little bit odd about that mound of rubble.

Looking at it from my window, I thought I could see a faint blue tinge in the space where it had once stood. And it was strange that there was so little of it left, too. Not really what you'd expect from a big, tall building.

I remember thinking that someone must have already started clearing it away. And that the blue tinge was just a trick of the light. I didn't know at the time that these were all important details.

I did put the pub into my scrapbook, though. I drew a picture of what it used to look like and what it looked like now it had fallen down. I wrote down the name as well. It was called The George.

During the last school holidays, Miss Farraway had given each of us a large green scrapbook to draw or write about things that we saw around us.

'Anything?' I'd asked her.

'Anything you see that is interesting, Ade,' she'd said. 'Or you can stick things in. If you find something you like the look of.'

She called them our Eye Spy books. I hadn't filled mine up with much so far. I'd only stuck in a bit of a Happy Meal box that I'd had once and drawn the buildings I could see from my window. It was hard to draw the straight lines of the towers, though. They always came out wobbly.

Now I'd drawn the pub too.

How was I to know that this was only the beginning?