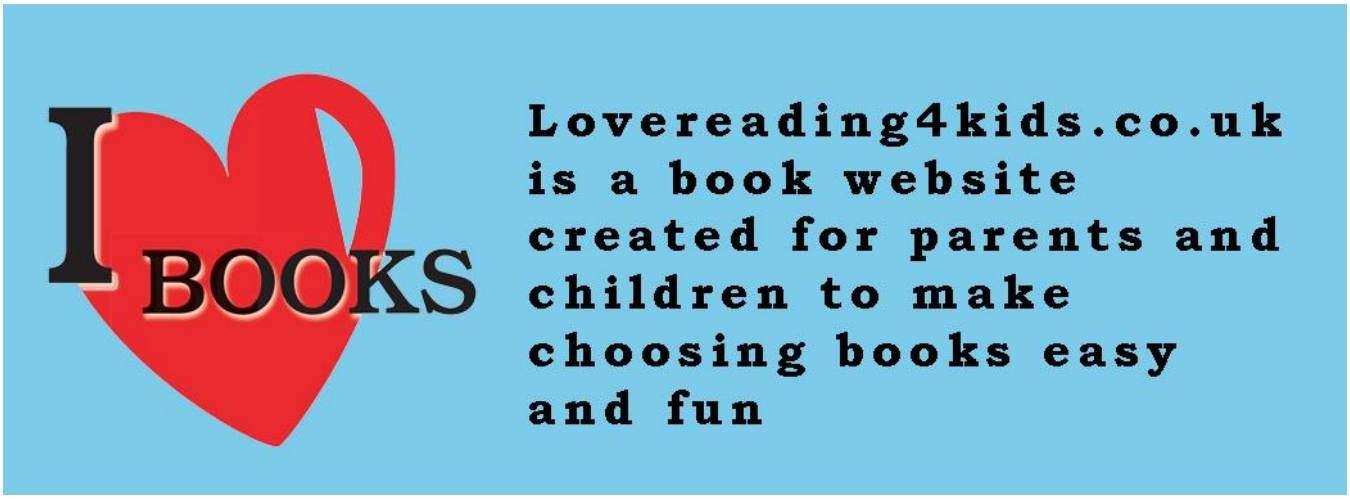



Opening extract from

# Love from Lexie

Written by

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Published by

**Puffin an imprint of Penguin Books Ltd**

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

The little girl is curled up on a second-hand sofa, snuggled in a handmade rainbow-striped jumper, her dark hair braided with bright cotton threads, an upturned library book at her feet. She is alone, hugging a knitted toy dog and watching *Frozen*.

Sometimes she pads into the kitchen to look at the clock on the wall. Sometimes she goes to the window and presses her cheek against the glass, looking up at the clear blue sky and then down to the pavement ten floors below.

She peels back the foil from a half-eaten Easter egg and nibbles it absently. When the movie finishes she goes to





check the clock once more, then returns to the window. The pavement glitters with broken glass and broken dreams, and when her eyes blur with tears she wipes them fiercely away with her sleeve.

She stays there, watching, waiting, until it gets dark.




1

# How It All Began

Have you ever been lost? I have.

In a supermarket when I was a toddler; at a funfair, briefly, aged four or five; on a day trip to Glasgow when I was seven, in the crowds on Buchanan Street. Each time, I was scared, panicked. Each time, my mum found me, wiped my tears, hugged me tight, took my hand and made it all better.

I thought that was just the way things were, the way things always would be. If you were lost, your mum would find you and make things better. I took it for granted.

I didn't realize back then that not everything that gets lost can be found again.

*







I was nine years old when it happened, and I wish I could say I'd seen it coming, but I really didn't . . . I didn't have a clue. For starters, we didn't live a regular kind of life. We moved around a lot.

For a while we lived in a flat in Edinburgh, then a farmhouse in the Scottish borders, a cottage by the sea, and once, for a whole summer, in a bell tent.

We ended up in a high-rise block of flats on a Midlands estate, which was probably the worst place of all . . . but we were happy. Well, I thought we were.

The lifts smelled of sick and the pavements were starred with broken glass, but at last we had a proper flat with a TV and everything. There was no garden, but Mum said the sky belonged to us. We were on the tenth floor, so there was plenty of it.

'We could spread our wings and fly, Lexie,' she told me a few months after we moved in. 'Go anywhere! London, Brighton, the south of France . . . You pick!'

'We could stay here,' I said uncertainly, but Mum said that was boring. She took my hands and danced me around the flat, laughing, but after a while I pulled away, pressed my nose against the windowpane and watched my breath







blur and mist the glass. It was the Easter break and the sky was unexpectedly blue, spread out before me like a promise. I was weary of the moves by then, weary of endless new starts in new schools with new best friends who were never going to be forever friends.

'I'm not a staying-in-one-place kind of person!' Mum said.

'I think might be,' I told her.

She ruffled my hair and told me not to be so silly, but she seemed anxious, doubtful. 'There's a whole wide world out there to explore,' she said, as if trying to convince herself. 'We'll get out there, the two of us, find new adventures! We'll find ourselves!'

I frowned. 'But . . . we're not lost,' I said.

'We are, Lexie,' Mum replied, and her eyes went all sad and faraway. 'We are.'

The next day Mum had an interview in town.

'I won't be too long,' she told me. 'A few hours at most – I might pop to the shops on my way back. You can watch a DVD while I'm gone.'

I slid *Frozen* into the DVD player and snuggled up on the sofa while Mum scribbled a shopping list on the back







of an envelope. *Bread, milk, baked beans, chocolate spread*, it said.

'I'll be back before it's finished,' she said, nodding towards the TV, and I barely looked up, just waved, my eyes still on the screen.

Mum went out just after 2 p.m. and she didn't come back.

Nina Lawlor,
Flat 7/10 [illegible]
Sk[illegible]

Dear Mum,

I waited as long as I could, but they came to get me in the end. I am staying with a foster family now but there are too many kids and I don't really like it. It is on Kenilworth Road but I forget the number because it fell off the door.

I am at a different school, the one near the park. Please come and find me soon. I miss you to the moon and back.

Love,

Lexie xxx