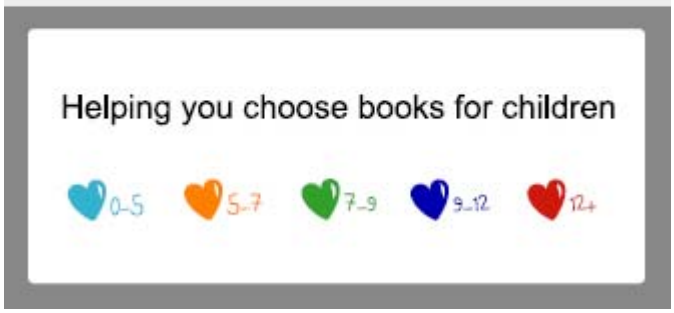
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Chapter 1

Do you remember, Lydia, when the mighty storm came, how lightning split the sky in two and thunder broke the night like a charge of elephants? You stood twitching by my bed, hoping to be invited in, when an orange dropped with a crash on to the roof from the tree outside the window. You leapt in the air like somebody had put a scorpion down your knickers, and landed right on top of me – OOMPH! You took my breath away with your bony elbows and nearly made your brother arrive early into the world. Do you remember how you giggled when I asked you how come you were suddenly so afraid of oranges? 'It's not the oranges,' you protested, and I teased you, saying you must be the only little girl in the whole of Africa to leap out of her skin because of an orange.

We lay there and waited for the storm to wear itself out. You sniggered when Baba turned warthog and grunted and snuffled as though searching for roots. You said we should put him out in the yard. He woke just as you said it, told you not to be a cheeky monkey, then went straight back to his grunting, only worse. The baby started kicking then. Perhaps he too was frightened by the storm, or the orange, or your father's snoring. You put your hand on the dome of my belly and felt a tiny foot slide across under the skin. You asked if I would let you help look after the baby when he was born. You said it would be good practice because you wanted to be a nurse when you grew up. I said what a big ambition that was for a little five-year-old. I said you could be the baby's second mummy and what a lucky baby he would be.

As the storm began to move away, I told you stories about the trickster rabbit and the lion king, until your eyes became so heavy that, even if all the oranges in the world had fallen on to the roof, they could not have kept you from sleeping.

There's something about a storm in the middle of the night that gathers a family close. It's as if

nothing else exists outside that huddle of love in a blacked-out room which, try as it might, the storm cannot overwhelm. Remember that closeness, Lydia, my child, and try to carry it with you through every dawning day.

Lydia shifted in the bed and dislodged her brother's knee from her hip. Outside, the storm had blown itself hollow and all that was left was the drip, drip, drip of raindrops on the upturned tin bath. On the other side of her brother, Kesi, their sister, was restless in her sleep, little wisps of anxiety escaping with each breath. Lydia leant across and stroked her hair, such thick, coarse hair, until she saw her lips relax into a flicker of a smile. At what point in their dreams had Kesi changed places with her brother, for she had begun the night as usual, tucked in the middle, safe from any evil spirits that might lurk under the bed?

Lydia wondered when it would be morning. The sky was still deep black through the window beyond the candle flame, but how much of that was just lingering clouds? She didn't know how long she had been asleep before the storm had woken her. It wasn't a mighty storm like the one her mother had described. Kesi and Joe had slept right through it. She hadn't been

able to go back to sleep herself and had lit the candle so that she could read her mother's book. She wasn't sure she wanted it to be morning. The night provided some respite from the drudgery of the day, from the problems that heaped themselves upon her however much she tried her hardest to avoid them. Sometimes it was all too much.

You will never be alone, Lydia, she read. I will always be there for you. Find your strength from me. Be that person we talked about who can climb the tallest tree and touch the moon.

'I can't even see the moon, Mama,' she sighed.

She put the book carefully on the floor, blew out the candle, lay back down and closed her eyes.