

Excerpt about Lydia

Source: *Torn Pages* by Sally Grindley

Lydia is a 13-year-old girl living in an African village. Her parents both died of AIDS and she is left to care for her siblings, 5 year old Kesi and 9 year old Joe.

Kesi sat at the table and watched as her sister rolled up the sheet and put it by the door of their home. *"I'm hungry,"* she whined. *"When are we going to eat?"*

What are we going to eat? Lydia asked herself.

Lydia wondered, if she stared hard enough [at the garden], whether she might see the stems spring upright again, all in one go. They were weeds, most of them, and seemed to have devoured the rows of vegetables she had planted so painstakingly while her mother watched, too ill to help. She knew she should set about weeding them to allow the vegetables a chance to breathe, but there never seemed to be the time and the ground was so hard it was impossible to pull the weeds without breaking off their heads. (p. 7)

"Joe won't be going to school any more, and neither will your sister. We can't afford it, especially if we have to start wasting money on medicines." [said Grandmother]

She [Lydia] hadn't been inside the school since before her mother died. There hadn't been the time, firstly while she was nursing her, and now that she was having to look after Joe and Kesi. She longed to go back.... *"Am I dreaming,"* Lydia wondered, *"by wanting to be back at school? Or am I being realistic, because it's only by going to school that I can better myself? Of course I'm dreaming,"* she muttered. *"I can't go back to school even if I want to, so I'm not being realistic."*

"Some of the boys and girls [at school] aren't very nice to me [Kesi] any more. ... They call me nasty names and say if anybody touches me they'll die.... They say I've got witch's blood in me and that soon I'll shrivel up and turn into a toad. They say mama filled me up with poison because she didn't like me. She [the teacher] makes me sit in the corner." (p. 19)

Mrs. Sibiya told her [Lydia] to wait, disappeared indoors and reappeared with a small bowl of beans. *"Here,"* she said, *"take this. It's all I can spare, but it will help a bit and your mother was a good friend to me. I wouldn't like to see you going hungry."* (p. 30)

"Here, child, take this with you." Mrs. Shandu handed her a bowl of nsima. *"Get some food inside you and things will seem better. And borrow this coat of mine before you freeze to death."* (p. 74)

Lydia filled her own jug just and set off back home. Something about the conversation with Mandis had sparked a deep longing in her, a longing to be somewhere else, to be someone else. To be amongst people who were full of the joy of life, not haunted by the shadow of death. To be able to dream of a future that could become a glorious reality, instead of watching it shatter at every turn of thought. To be free of the responsibility of looking after Joe and Kesi. (p. 61)

Grindley, Sally. *Torn Pages*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009. Printed with permission.