

"Juniper!" Etienne gasps. "Do you hear the shots at night? Do you hear the gunfire?"

"Yes," I say in almost a whisper.

"They say it's to scare off birds and animals. To stop them coming across. But I don't think they'd discriminate, and I don't think they'd care which way you were travelling."

I stare at the stilted metal cages that fringe the Buffer Zone at regular intervals. Each cage with its own sniper. Border Patrol.

"They don't ever stop watching. And they shoot to kill." Etienne's voice is desperate. And scared. He's scared for us.

"I'll figure it out," I say boldly, dismissive. Right now I just want him to shut up. I don't want to be told it's impossible and I definitely don't want him to use Bear against me. "Mum did it. She got across."

"It was different then."

"We don't have a choice, Etienne!" I snap. "Not if they've taken Ms Endo. Don't you see? Abbott's out to get us. Bear and I will be next. Only it won't be the Institute, it'll be worse."

Etienne nods slowly. "I'm not saying it's impossible. Nothing's impossible, but you need to know what you're doing."

"Yeah?" I say, trying to get the right tone. Like I know that already, but if he has information to share he should tell us.

"So you have a plan worked out?"

"No," I say, deciding to be honest with him. "We have some old camping gear and we have a map, but that's it."

"The map takes you to your parents?"

"Allegedly."

"And you have the resistance?"

"Yeah, allegedly we have that too. The ticks won't get us. Something else can have that pleasure."

"You don't have a plan for the Buffer though?"

"We run, right? I guess we wait for dark first."

Etienne rolls his eyes. "Seriously, Juniper, you've got to do better than that."