



Ever since Abbott threatened him with the Institute, Etienne's been planning his escape. If they ever try and send him, he'll be ready to leave. "I can't go there, Juniper, I swear. I'll run. I'll run into the Wild. I'd rather get the disease."

He gets out some papers from a drawer. White sheets scrawled over with pencil sketches.

"You never told me you drew," I say, surprised.

Etienne blushes. "I don't. Not like you, Juniper. They're just diagrams." He angles them away from me and starts rifling through them. "This is the one. Here."

It's a plan. It takes a while to work out what it is, but the Palm House is on it and from that you can work out pretty much everything else. The boundary of our city either side of our block, with all the buildings marked and the lookout stations too. Each one has a series of numbers next to it. Times. Schedules.

"Wow," I say, reeling at the detail. It's all pencil except for the lookout posts. Some are red, some are yellow, some blue. "What are the colours for?"

"They're zones," Etienne says. "It's a network. You have to understand the network." He takes me through all of it – the results of his meticulous thinking, his locked-up, clever brain, keeping itself sane.

The lookout posts are always manned, but the pool of border officials this falls to is small. Sometimes, if someone is sick, they don't bother covering their post. Or if something happens in another part of town, border officers are the first people to be called in to help. Etienne takes a clean sheet of paper and I watch his fingers sketch it out. Which alarm needs to go off, which guards this will alert and for how long. Everything that needs to happen in order to leave a stretch of Buffer unmonitored for the time it should take to cross it.

Etienne's not got the resistance but he's planned his escape anyway. That's how bad this place has become.

"How would I get the alarm to go off?"

Etienne frowns. "That's the tricky part. Sometimes there's trouble at the Warren – they pull in every guard for a mile for that, but you can't make that happen. Well, not easily. Sometimes someone breaks away on another part of the grid, but unless you've got someone willing to make a bid for freedom—"