

across until we reach the Wild.

"Let me do it for you," Etienne says now. "Give me the matches and I'll set the fire. You concentrate on getting out."

I shake my head decisively. It's one thing helping us come up with the plan. It's another thing to take part in it. "I already told you. I can do it, Etienne. I don't need you."

"Let me, Juniper. In this whole adventure, it's the only thing I can do." His voice is insistent. He's not like Sam or Silvan, Etienne actually wants to be part of our escape.

"No. I don't want to be out there worrying about you. I don't want there to be anyone left here for them to blame."

"Juniper. You've barely any time left in this place. Barely any time left with Annie Rose. Are you telling me you want to spend it starting fires?"

"I couldn't forgive myself if—"

"Juniper," he says again. "It'll be campfires every night now for you and Bear. This is my one chance. Are you seriously going to deny me it?"

I laugh softly, even though I really want to cry. "You've done so much already. Especially with that GPS. Do you know how worried I've been about my map-reading?"

Etienne grins. "I should've given it to you before. You should have had it the day I found it. It was never for me. I don't have a place to type in. I'm like Colin in *The Secret Garden*. I wasn't meant for the outside."

"No. No! Don't say that. Because it's not true. Colin got out, didn't he? He went outside and you will too. I know it."

"You know it?" Etienne laughs.

"Yes, deep down inside. I know it." And somehow as I say it, it feels real. I can see him out there. I can see all of us – Etienne, Bear and I – running together across grass with flowers just like the ones on Bear's wall. "Etienne," I say suddenly, "that place at the North Edge behind the yellow tape, where I thought Sam was breeding the Sticks?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, he isn't. Not Sticks. Ticks! Ticks, Etienne! They're doing a trial for disease resistance. They're looking for participants."

Etienne nods blankly, but I see him flinch.

"You get me?" I say.

"Sam didn't tell me," he says and I hear the hurt in his voice.

"I'm telling you! You can't go back there. No one from our school can. It's too dangerous."

He nods again, but he's not quite looking at me.

"I mean it. They wouldn't care, Etienne, if you lived or died. Sam wouldn't care. You've got to stay away!"

"Sam would care," he says loyally.

"No, Etienne!"

"He would, Juniper. You don't know him like I do. After the Jack incident, Sam was the only person who understood